

# Careers in the Arts

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## Studio Art / Arts Administration

Vicki Meek

*Vicki Meek is a Dallas-based artist who also works as an administrator at the South Dallas Cultural Center, an important community enrichment organization.*



### Could you introduce yourself?

My name is Vicki Meek and I am an artist, arts administrator, arts educator, and a cultural critic. All of these jobs are incorporated in my current job which is Manager of the South Dallas Cultural Center but throughout my career, I have done one or more of these jobs in all the positions I held. I started working professionally in the arts as a sculpture instructor at Kentucky State University where I also taught art history courses. While there I was asked to run the university gallery which is how I was introduced to arts administration. From there I went to work at the Connecticut Commission on the Arts where I deepened my arts administration skills as the Artists in Schools Coordinator and later as a Senior Program Administrator. My move to Texas allowed me to work as an artist when I joined the City of Dallas City Arts Program's CETA Artist Residency Program. This program allowed me to utilize my design skills but also gave me an opportunity to work in the West Dallas community with children and youth. In 1983 I joined the administrative staff of the City Arts Program as the first Supervisor of Community Arts Development. I designed funding programs for small and mid-sized cultural organizations, artists and arts presenters. In my 32 years in Dallas I also ran a small alternative visual arts space, served as Artistic Director for the Kennedy Center Imagination Celebration and co-directed a major public arts project before becoming manager of the South Dallas Cultural Center.

### Could you describe a typical work day?

There is no such thing as a typical day for most arts administrators and this certainly applies to my work day! One day may require I work on a grant proposal to get funds for a special youth program. Later that day, I may have to meet with some community people to discuss how to use the cultural center resources to decrease teen violence. The day may progress with me hosting an event and end with me installing an art exhibit. This is one of the reasons I have been able to stay energized throughout my 15 years working as manager at the Cultural Center. There's rarely a dull moment, or a predictable day!

### Who or what influenced you to be an artist?

I always wanted to be an artist from the time I was a little girl until today. My parents collected art and my older brother was an artist and a musician so art was always a part of my life. My father was responsible for organizing art exhibitions at a place called The Wharton Center in Philadelphia, my hometown. So I was privileged to meet many professional African American artists as a child. My parents introduced me through art books to Elizabeth Catlett, a very important African American sculptor so that I would have a role model as I developed as an artist.

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### **What kind of professional training did you go through to become an artist?**

I studied art from the time I was 8 years old. My first training was at Fleischer Memorial Art School in Philadelphia. I went to college to study sculpture and ultimately earned my Bachelor of Fine Arts at Tyler School of Fine Arts, the art school for Temple University. I went on to earn my Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin in Madison Wisconsin. I did additional post-graduate work in Art History at Queens College, in New York. All of my arts administration skills were acquired on the job since at the time that I took my first job in this field, there were no college programs in this field. Now you can earn a degree in Arts Administration at a variety of fine universities.

### **What is your favorite part of being an artist?**

The best thing about being an artist is having the ability to express very emotional feelings, or special concerns about humanity using a medium that crosses all cultural, racial, gender, or ethnic barriers.

### **What is the most challenging part of being an artist?**

The most challenging part of being an artist is getting the work seen by as many people as possible. This requires making contact with a lot of different arts venues and constantly keeping my work in the public arena. With my daily responsibilities at the Cultural Center, it can be challenging to keep myself working on art as well.

### **What advice do you have for students who are interested in becoming artists?**

The best advice I can give any student who wants to become an artist is to be passionate about your pursuit of art. That means see as much art as you possibly can, constantly work on improving your skills (you never stop learning as an artist!) and try to keep your mind open to all kinds of art, regardless of whether you plan to make art like it. Everything can inform your work and sometimes the strangest things will, if you allow yourself to be open to experiencing all that life can bring!

*Interview conducted in 2014.*



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