

United Scenic Artists (USA)

What is USA?

United Scenic Artists, Local 829, is a labor union representing designers and artists in the entertainment industry. It is a nationwide autonomous Local of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). Benefits of membership include the security of working under a collective bargaining agreement, better working conditions and wages, and access to health insurance, a pension plan, an annuity plan, and a 401(K).

USA Local 829 has regional offices in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and Boston, serving members across the country. The members of Local 829 are artists and craftspeople working in film, theater, opera, ballet, television, industrial shows, commercials, and exhibitions. Through the union, they work together to protect standards, working conditions, and wages. Such protection is greatly needed in an industry plagued by high unemployment, tight work schedules, and loose payment schedules.

USA has contracts with the major film studios and television networks and many individual stations and production companies. These contracts cover art direction and costume design for film, television, and commercials in the East and Midwest. Every Tony design award for Broadway goes to an 829 member, as do a great many Emmys and, increasingly, Oscars.

How do I become a USA member?

Local 829 membership categories include: Scenic Art (Painting), Costume Design, Lighting Design, Scenic Design, Sound Design, Computer Arts, Mural Artist, Graphic Artist, Allied Crafts, Diorama and Display, and Industrial (Shop-person). Gaining membership in the union is achieved by way of Professional Membership Application, Category Examinations, and/or Allied Crafts Interview.

- **Professional Membership Application.** The applicant may be asked to present a portfolio to a review committee at an interview, at the discretion of the business manager. The business manager will present the applicant's credentials and current job status at the next general membership meeting for a vote. Should the application be denied, the initiation fee is refunded.

Individuals who have worked as a designer on five regional productions at LORT theatres may also submit a professional membership application.

- **Allied Crafts Interview.** The Allied Crafts Classification was created for people who possess specialized skills in just one aspect of a particular classification—for example: prop makers who may be very skilled at that craft but do not possess the overall skills required of scenic artists; costume painters who, qualified though they may be at what they do, cannot qualify

as costume designers; or specialists in multi-media, front and rear projection, slides, and filters who lack the overall expertise required of a lighting designer. Currently, Allied Crafts includes but is not limited to computer graphics designers, theme park workers, storyboard artists, specialty crafts (costume painters, prop designers, special effects), and projection designers.

Allied Crafts applicants are scheduled for interviews at which they must present a portfolio that should show a range of skills as well as support the resume. Allied Crafts Interviews are scheduled on an "as-needed" basis throughout the year. The main criteria is working as a professional for at least two years. The union will consider adding new Allied Crafts categories when applicants express an interest.

For further information, contact:

The Allied Crafts Review Committee
United Scenic Artists, Local 829
29 West 38th Street, 15th Floor
New York City, New York 10018

To request an appointment at the next scheduled Allied Crafts Interview, please call the business office at 212.581.0300.

- **Designer Apprentice Program.** The 829 Designer Apprenticeship is set up for people who have exhibited the basic skills, talent, and desire to become fully developed working professional designers through a series of assistant relationships with established 829 members. Examples of such candidates might be: college or graduate students at or near the end of their academic careers, current 829 members who wish to add a category, and people with limited experience in stock, regional theatre, or low budget films. This program is not a summer or semester internship, nor is it for those with no previous design experience.

Applications must be mailed or dropped off at the Local's offices for review. This review will occur on a rolling admissions basis but will not commence until all application materials are received by the office.

For more information, see the Local 829 Web site or contact:

Debra Dumas, Program Administrator, 516.676.5991,
debomas@optonline.net or Joe Saint, Chair, Designer
Apprenticeship Committee, 212.206.7417, joe@jkl.com.

Each regional office has slightly different procedures governing entrance into Local 829. If you are interested in seeking membership into Local 829 in New England, contact the office in Boston. The Local 829 Web site has contact information for other areas. Nationally, the initiation fees range from \$1,000 to \$3,500.

Local 829 has collective bargaining agreements that cover employment in the following areas: Broadway, network television, Metropolitan and New York City Operas, feature films, regional opera, major ballet, AICP commercials, LORT, scenery suppliers and independent not-for-profit theatres. Professionals securing a job in one of these areas must apply for membership by contacting the USA business manager as soon as possible at 212.581.0300. A copy of the contract must be submitted, along with a prepayment of the initiation fee. This prepayment is held in escrow until the application can be proposed to the general membership for acceptance.

For more information, see the Local 829 Web site or contact:

General office:

United Scenic Artists, Local 829
29 West 38th Street
New York, NY 10018

212.581.0300
Fax: 212.977.2011

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www.usa829.org

Boston office:

New England Regional Office, USA Local 829
Kevin Sciotto, Regional Business Representative
P.O. Box 380
304 Newbury Street
Boston, MA 02115

401.351.9294
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kevins@usa829.org

*Thanks to Jeff Gardiner and Kevin Sciotto for assistance in compiling this information.
This article is adapted from a chapter by Jeff Gardiner appearing in The Source before 2002. It originally appeared
in the fourth edition of The Source, in 1996. Gardiner is a Boston-area set and lighting designer.*