

**A BLADE OF GRASS ANNOUNCES ITS 2020 FELLOWS FOR
SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART, INCLUDING NEW ANNUAL FELLOWSHIP
TO SUPPORT A YOUNG NYC-BASED ARTIST OF COLOR**

**\$20K Grant Awards Are Now Unrestricted to Help Artists Deal with
Repercussions of COVID-19**

**2020 Fellows Propose Ambitious Projects Exploring Indigenous Identities, Healthcare
Access, Migrants' Rights, Black Artistic Legacy, Criminal Justice Reform, and
Other Pressing Contemporary Issues**

New York, NY - May 6, 2020 – A Blade of Grass, the nonprofit dedicated to fostering socially engaged art nationwide, today announced the eight artists and artist collectives who will be the organization's 2020 Fellows for Socially Engaged Art. This includes the inaugural recipient for A Blade of Grass's new Fellowship for POC Emerging Artists in New York City, as well as the ongoing A Blade of Grass-SPArt Fellow for Los Angeles, for which a Los Angeles-based artist is selected in collaboration with SPART, a philanthropic initiative that supports social practice in Los Angeles. All of the Fellowships, which are awarded annually, support artists and artist collectives working with communities in ways that encourage social and political change at ambitious scale.

Launched in 2014, the Fellowship provides artist and artist collectives with a \$20,000 minimally restricted honorarium as well as support from A Blade of Grass' professional network to help in the production and execution of proposed projects. While the 2020 Fellows were selected on the basis of specific project ideas, A Blade of Grass has made this year's grants fully unrestricted to help artists during this unprecedented time of crisis. As such, the funds can be used for anything from studio supplies to housing and other necessities. A Blade of Grass leadership will also work with the 2020 Fellows to achieve as many of the original project goals as is possible given the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, or help to conceptualize project adaptations to address the new circumstances.

The 2020 Fellows for Socially Engaged Art include **Alfredo Salazar-Caro** (New York), the inaugural dedicated Fellow for POC Emerging Artists in New York City; **Cannupa Hanska Luger** (New Mexico); a collective including **Alex Hare, Zhailon Levingston, and Nehemiah Lockett** (New York); the **Hidden Voices** collective (various national locations, headquartered in North Carolina); **Taja Lindley** (New York); the **Papel Machete** collective (Puerto Rico); **Tornillo: The Occupation Coalition** (Texas and Mexico), and **Rosalind McGary** (California), the A Blade of Grass-SPArt Fellow. Additional information about each of this year's fellows follows below.

"Artists are uniquely positioned to catalyze the existing power of communities through collaborative projects that help us imagine and build a better future. Our Fellowship program has always been about supporting visionary artists who engage with civic life and spur innovative social change at a truly ambitious scale. In this unprecedented moment, these artists, and the work we do to articulate the value of their work, is more relevant than ever," said Deborah Fisher, executive director of A Blade of Grass. "As part of our commitment to artists, and in effort to meet them where they are in this strange new reality, we have

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made this year's funds completely unrestricted and trust our artists to decide best how to utilize them. This is a necessary investment in the artists themselves, whether their projects shift to more direct COVID-19 response, continue as planned, or have to be rethought. The world has completely changed since they applied and were selected for the Fellowship, but that makes the range of visions and approaches in their work no less groundbreaking. We are incredibly encouraged by their adaptability, creativity, and grace in rising to meet the challenge of these times."

Fellows are selected through a multi-tiered process. Following an open call, fellows are chosen by a selection committee based on three core elements: their proposal's artistic value; the depth and quality of the plan to enact social change; and the applicant's commitment to social engagement in their artistic practice as a whole. This year's eight Fellowships were selected from a pool of 494 applicants by a selection committee comprised of artist and former A Blade of Grass Fellow, Tomie Arai; Program Officer for Sundra Foundation's Thriving Cultures Program, Robert Smith III; Associate Curator of Public Programs at Friends of the High Line, Diya Vij; Assembly Program Coordinator at Recess, Stephanye Watts; and Deputy Director at 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica, CA, Sue Yank, with A Blade of Grass Director of Programs, Prerana Reddy.

ABOUT THE 2020 FELLOWS

Information about each Fellow follows below, along with a brief description of the proposed project for which they were selected. Though A Blade of Grass will continue to support the development of these projects where possible, the Fellowships this year have been awarded without the expectation that the projects will be completed. The timing and format of the projects may also change pending the COVID-19 situation.

A BURNING CHURCH PROJECT

@alexleehare, @zhailon, and @nehemiahlucket

Director Alex Hare, writer/director Zhailon Levingston, and composer Nehemiah Lockett are embarking on the Burning Church Project, a traveling developmental series supporting the creation of their new musical *A Burning Church*. The show depicts moments in the life of a Baptist church in Alabama over the last four decades, aiming to ask questions about the radical potential of the contemporary church in the United States. The project engages with a sector of American society that is often seen as entrenched in conservative politics, and seeks to develop dialogues with church-goers about Christianity's relationship to capitalism, sexuality, police violence, and more. The artists were chosen for their proposal to visit three churches in the U.S. and perform segments of the play, inviting feedback from the audiences and initiating discussions with congregants and community-members. The project culminates in a theatrical run in NYC, which will incorporate the dialogues the artists had with church-goers around the country.

ALFREDO SALAZAR-CARO

@tmvrtx

@jaguarsdaughter

Alfredo Salazar-Caro is A Blade of Grass' first recipient of the Fellowship for POC Emerging Artists in NYC. The artist's work combines portraiture, sculpture, installation, documentary, video, and VR/AR elements to create immersive environments. His newest body of work illuminates the experiences of immigrants and migrants across the Americas. Salazar-Caro was selected for his proposal to build upon the success of his acclaimed VR film, *Dreams Of The Jaguar's Daughter*, and to develop parts two and three of the trilogy. The

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trilogy invites audiences to bear witness to the historic passage of the 2018 migrants' caravan, starting in Guatemala, through Mexico, and the Arizona desert. Mixing authentic archeological renderings, surrealistic interpretation, and compelling narrative, the trilogy pays homage to the history and culture of those making this journey.

CANNUPA HANSKA LUGER

@cannupahanska

@settlement_uk

Cannupa Hanska Luger is a New Mexico-based multidisciplinary artist who grew up on the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota and identifies with several Native American nations. His work combines his apprenticeship in traditional craft techniques, together with contemporary art methodologies, and political action, to create alternatives to the narrow, stereotypical, and inaccurate portrayals of indigeneity and Native American art. Luger's proposed project, *Settlement*, coincides with the anniversary of the 1620 voyage of the Mayflower. Luger and 27 other indigenous artists from North America and the Pacific plan to stage a creative occupation in Plymouth, England, hosting exhibitions, performances, and installations designed to deepen the dialogue about intersectional Indigenous identities and put into practice decolonization. *Settlement* will commence with a day of programming produced by members of the Wampanoag nation.

HIDDEN VOICES

@hiddenvoicesus

Hidden Voices is a collective that reorients the personal stories and experiences of marginalized people to positions of visibility and impact. Through workshops, dialogue, and deep listening informed by restorative justice, Hidden Voices seeks to create real, empathetic connections within communities that will lead to change. The collective was selected for their plans to develop a music theater titled *A GOOD BOY*, which explores the impact of America's Death Row on family members, and asks how their stories can help us create a more compassionate society. Hidden Voices positions Death Row as an extreme microcosm of our over-incarcerated nation, where we rarely think of those we execute, much less their families.

PAPEL MACHETE

@papelmachete

Papel Machete is a radical Puerto Rican theater collective that engages a range of art forms and storytelling techniques grounded in intersectional, working-class politics. Founded in 2006, Papel Machete has worked with a variety of theatrical forms including toy theater, shadow theatre, table-top puppetry, and giant puppets. The collective aims to use theatrical creativity to motivate their audiences to social action. Papel Machete was selected on the basis of their proposal to develop a bilingual multimedia performance, *On the Eve of Abolition*, set on the imaginary day of the last prison closing. Incorporating a range of source material and performance techniques, Papel Machete tackles one of the critical social justice issues of our time by presupposing the success of the Prison Abolition Movement from a place of collective decision making, reflection, and accountability.

ROSALIND MCGARY

@rosalindmgary

Rosalind McGary, the second A Blade of Grass-SPArt Fellow for Los Angeles, is a visual artist and curator who grew up in Compton, left to pursue her career and returned to initiate the Sêpia Artist Collective, which supports space making and collaborative opportunity for artists of color living and working in South

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Los Angeles. While conducting research for an exhibition on Compton's revolutionary first Black Mayor, Douglas F. Dollarhide (elected in 1969), McGary discovered an archive of the Compton Communicative Arts Academy, an artist's collective active in the 1970s, where artists working in the city were supported with funding, exhibition, studio, and performance space. In turn, they served the community by mentoring and encouraging young artists. Recognizing the restorative potential of making the documentary materials she has uncovered more visible, McGary will undergo an art-based research process to produce arts projects in the city that are community centered, and seek out similar participation and support from city and county leadership that the Arts Academy formerly enjoyed. McGary wishes to generate an intergenerational knowledge exchange that instills a sense of potential for a prosperous and productive future, based on a sense of pride for past and current accomplishments within a city that has been unjustly dominated by a false narrative that minimizes its residents' achievements. In reclaiming Compton's narrative, McGary seeks to establish arts and cultural production as a legitimate force for political and economic change.

TAJA LINDLEY

@TajaLindley

@BXbirthjustice

Taja Lindley is a New York-based visual and performing artist with a history of working with nonprofits, research institutes, and government on policies and programming that impact women and girls and communities of color. Her Bronx Birth Justice Tribunal builds upon the groundwork she established while participating in the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs' Public Artist in Residence program (PAIR) at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene working on the issues of maternal health and racial justice. For this project, Lindley will work with Bronx residents who are pregnant, parenting, or of reproductive age to share their stories of racism and systemic oppression they experience navigating their sexual and reproductive health with an audience of local medical providers, administrators, and policymakers. Lindley envisions The Tribunal as offering a different dynamic where the nature of its creative presentation can touch healthcare stakeholders and decision makers more profoundly than statistics and traditional listening sessions can. The Tribunal is an opportunity to center patients and their experiences in the development of policies and practices for addressing inequities in maternal mortality specifically in the Bronx and generally in NYC; and to shift maternal health outcomes from solely a public health issue to a racial equity issue that will be addressed by diverse stakeholders.

TORNILLO: THE OCCUPATION COALITION

@casa_carmelita

Tornillo: The Occupation Coalition began as a convergence of artists and activists from around the country who came together to occupy the children's detention camp that opened in Tornillo, a suburb of El Paso, Texas. After the camps closing the group remained, working on the front lines of migrant rights under the mission of "Resistance & Assistance." They combine ongoing cultural actions informed by the historical precedence of the city, as a catalyst for racial and social justice, with direct assistance to refugees in migration. The collective seeks to disrupt the normalization and marginalization of the human rights crisis happening on the US-Mexico border. For their new project, Casa Carmelita, the coalition acquired a permanent space located at the border checkpoint and named it after Carmelita Torres, considered a Rosa Parks figure of Mexican-American rights. The Fellowship was awarded in support of this new space and its planned programming, such as Food Not Walls, a meals program that provides culturally appropriate, nutritious food to those in El Paso shelters and the tent encampments across the border. It will also house visiting artists and activists that will conduct healing rituals and artmaking workshops with a social justice perspective.

ABOUT A BLADE OF GRASS

[@abladeofgrassorg](#)

A Blade of Grass is a national arts non-profit established in 2011 that nurtures socially engaged art through direct financial support to artists, advocating for artists working in the field, and creating digital and print media, documentary films, public programs, and research. For more information, please visit www.abladeofgrass.org.

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