



MID-AMERICA ARTS ALLIANCE

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY THROUGH ART

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For Immediate Release

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Mid-America Arts Alliance Awards \$226,500 for Art Projects Across Region

Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) is pleased to announce the recipients of its Artistic Innovations grants for FY22 (July 1, 2021–June 2022). Sixteen individual artists and art organizations in M-AAA's region have been awarded up to \$15,000 for the creation or production of new artwork. This year's projects range from a new play by a Nebraska playwright about the first Juneteenth to a performance that combines lucha wrestling with Aztec mythology. These grants are made possible with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

M-AAA's President and CEO Todd Stein said, "We are inspired by the creativity that comes from the arts organizations and artists within our region and the Artistic Innovations grant program provides us the opportunity to recognize their projects. Mid-America Arts Alliance is grateful for the funding from the National Endowment for the Arts that allows us to support the FY22 Artistic Innovations awardees."

About the Artistic Innovations grant, Prism Movement Theater's Jeffrey Coloangelo said, "Prism Movement Theater is completely overjoyed to have received the M-AAA award. *Lucha Teotl* is a huge, ambitious project we've spent nearly three years planning. We knew the minute we decided to do this project about the art of lucha libre that we needed to do it justice. M-AAA's grant comes to us at a perfect opportunity, allowing us to fulfill our artistic vision for this incredible project. We are so genuinely grateful and proud to be awarded this grant." *Lucha Teotl*, a bilingual performance that combines elements of lucha wrestling with Aztec mythology, will premiere as part of AT&T Performing Arts Center's Elevator Project series in the Dallas Arts District in Potter Rose Performance Hall in the Wylie Theatre (July 15–24, 2021).

Project Descriptions, organized by discipline

Dance

Junior Players Guild, Dallas, Texas

Grant: \$13,000

Project: Amplify

Dallas's Junior Players Guild will present *Amplify*, a new teen dance production developed to explore and showcase themes of social justice, racial equity, and the challenges marginalized communities face. The Junior Players plans to pair three BIPOC choreographers with nine North Texas high school dancers in an original dance performance, scheduled to take place in August 2021. This is the first Artistic Innovations grant for the Junior Players Guild.

Film/Media

Sav Rodgers, Olathe, Kansas

Grant: \$15,000

Project: *Chasing Chasing Amy*

Sav Rodgers's documentary film *Chasing Chasing Amy* examines the transformational impact that *Chasing Amy* (1997), one queer, '90s rom-com had on the Kansas artist versus the controversial effect and lasting influence that filmmaker Kevin Smith's cult classic had on the broader LGBTQ+ community. As Rodgers uncovers the film's impact, he also begins to accept his authentic self and comes out as a transgender man. The work is an extension of Rodgers's well known [TED talk, "The Rom-Com That Saved My Life"](#) from 2018. The planned 2022 release for *Chasing Chasing Amy* coincides with the 25th anniversary of *Chasing Amy*. This is the first Artistic Innovations grant for Rodgers, a participant in M-AAA's Artist INC Advance program in Kansas City and an artist selected for M-AAA's [reflect / project](#) exhibition series.

Rodney Thompson, Kansas City, Missouri

Grant: \$15,000

Project: *The Marble Rebellion*

With support from this grant, filmmaker Rodney Thompson will produce and direct *The Marble Rebellion*, a short dramatic film about battle of wills between a grandfather and his grandsons. The film explores the inner workings of interpersonal relationships between adults and children, revealing how supposedly vulnerable youth are able to reverse the dynamics of power and impose their will on an unsuspecting adult in this age-old tale of the struggle for power. This is Thompson's first Artistic Innovations grant.

Literature

James Ewald, Edmond, Oklahoma

Grant: \$10,000

Project: Flat Land: The History of Oklahoma Skateboarding

Skateboarding in Oklahoma is the focus of James Ewald's project. Called *Flat Land*, the project will create a limited edition book and prints about the history of the sport as told through interviews, photographs, unpublished stories, and research about competitions, companies, and more in Oklahoma. The project will include a presentation about skateboarding and the process of the project at the Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center. This is Ewald's first Artistic Innovations grant.

Candice Wiley, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Grant: \$15,000

Project: What If—Tulsa

What If—Tulsa will be an historically based Choose Your Own Adventure story-gaming app. With content based on the 1921 Tulsa Massacre, *What If—Tulsa* will be a game that users access on their smartphone or tablet. It will allow users to play through six stories set in 1921 Tulsa and alter the direction of the narrative through their gameplay choices. The project is anticipated to launch in October 2021. This is Wiley's first Artistic Innovations grant.

Music

Mount Sequoyah Center, Fayetteville, Arkansas

Grant: \$15,000

Project: Chamber Music on the Mountain

Based on popular music festivals, Chamber Music on the Mountain (CMM), presented by the Mount Sequoyah, will offer a year-round concert series bringing high caliber musicians to collaborate with local musicians, artists and organizations in Northwest Arkansas. The goal is to connect classical chamber music with new audiences through smaller, casual concerts in an outdoor setting. As part of the series, CMM will partner with non-classical music artists for every concert, instigating a cross-fertilization of various art forms.

Society for the Performing Arts, Houston, Texas

Grant: \$15,000

Project: Houston Artist Commissioning Project

This grant to the Society of Performing Arts will support its Houston Artist Commissioning Project (HACP). In this pilot program, six new works will be commissioned and performed at four in-person performances as well as virtual ones. The HACP seeks to support local performing artists of every genre, especially individual artists and independent companies. Artists will participate in a variety of education and community engagement programs in fall 2021 leading up to their live premiere, including lectures, a panel discussion, and a curated engagement opportunity with students. This is the first Artistic Innovations grant for Houston's Society of Performing Arts.

Tru Born (Anthony Michael Peterson), Jennings, Missouri

Grant: \$15,000

Project: The River Runs Through Me

The River Runs Through Me will be a new participatory performance that brings live audiences on a journey through the music born of the African American experience. Just as the griots of West Africa were traveling musicians, poets, and storytellers who passed on oral traditions across generations, Peterson, who performs as Tru Born, will offer through original music and spoken verse his own story growing up as a Black man in St. Louis as a way to invite audiences to discover the spirit, tensions, and inheritances that have travelled through African and European musical traditions to reach us now. Tru Born, a St. Louis native, is a guitarist, singer-songwriter, educator, and author with degrees from the Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA, and North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC. This is the artist's first Artistic Innovations grant.

Theater

Bluebarn Theatre, Omaha, Nebraska

Grant: \$15,000

Project: *Buffalo Women*, a World Premiere Play by Beaufield Berry

Omaha's Bluebarn Theatre will develop and produce *Buffalo Women*, a new play by Nebraska playwright Beaufield Berry. In her new project, *Buffalo Women*, Berry depicts an iconic moment in American history, the first Juneteenth. The premier of this play follows the theatre's successful collaboration and presentation of Berry's work *Red Summer*. The production *Buffalo Women* will feature a primary creative team and cast of regional BIPOC artists, and a score by award-winning musician J. Isaiah Smith, also a native Nebraskan. This is the first Artistic Innovations grant for the Bluebarn Theatre.

Prism Movement Theater, Dallas, Texas

Grant: \$15,000

Project: *Lucha Teotl*

Lucha Teotl is a new production from Prism Movement Theater featuring a mix of local Dallas acting talent and local luchadores, or wrestlers. *Lucha Teotl* is an immersive experience, with the audience ringside watching luchadores wearing the masks of Aztec gods, playing out a sincere and exciting wrestling storyline. While popular in Latin America, lucha libre has been underrepresented in Dallas culture. By incorporating lucha libre and luchadors, this new work respectfully reflects the high drama and rich cultural history of lucha in a theatrical narrative. They are working with seasoned lucha libre performers in authentically creating the production to represent the community and the craft of this popular entertainment. A bilingual performance, *Lucha Teotl* will premiere as part of AT&T Performing Arts Center's Elevator Project series in the Dallas Arts District in Potter Rose Performance Hall in the Wylie Theatre (July 15–24, 2021). This is the first Artistic Innovations grant for the Prism Movement Theater.

St. Louis Black Repertory Company, University City, Missouri

Grant: \$15,000

Project: #realchange: A main stage co-production between the Nebraska Rep and St. Louis Black Repertory Company

This project is the co-production of *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea* by Nathan Alan Davis. A present-day hero's quest exploring the lengths and depths we must go to redeem history's wrongs, the play tells the story of Dontrell Jones, a eighteen year old who decides it is his duty and destiny to venture into the Atlantic Ocean in search of an ancestor lost during the Middle Passage. The play, to be produced and directed by Ron Himes, will open at the Nebraska Repertory Company in Lincoln, Nebraska, this fall before traveling to The Black Rep, where it will be performed at the Edison Theatre on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis in spring 2022. Funding will also assist in community programming about the play in both Lincoln and St. Louis. This is the first grant for St. Louis Black Repertory Company.

Salvage Vanguard Theater, Austin, Texas

Grant: \$15,000

Project: *Casta*

This Austin-based organization will use the grant funds to produce the world premiere of *Casta*, written by Afro-Latina playwright Adrienne Dawes. The multilingual hybrid performance is inspired by the casta paintings of Miguel Cabrera, an eighteenth-century painter from Oaxaca, Mexico. At the heart of this project is intersection: overlapping histories, identities, perspectives, different areas of scholarship, and art forms converge within *Casta*. Salvage Vanguard Theater and Dawes are collaborating with professors and the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas–Austin. The Blanton Museum's exhibition *Painted Cloth: Fashion and Ritual in Colonial Latin America* will include casta paintings from Lima and Puebla, and the play will run for three weeks in the Blanton Museum atrium during the exhibition. Dawes is a peer facilitator for M-AAA's program Artist INC in Northwest Arkansas. This the second Artist Innovations grant for Salvage Vanguard Theater.

Visual Arts

108 Contemporary, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Grant: \$10,000

Project: *The Space Between: Anita Fields and Molly Murphy Adams*

108 Contemporary, an exhibition space in the Tulsa Arts District, will present the exhibition *The Space Between: Anita Fields & Molly Murphy Adams* (October 1–November 21, 2021). Anita Fields (Osage) and Molly Murphy Adams (Oglala Lakota), are both Oklahoma-based, Native women who are currently Tulsa

Artist Fellows. The artists' work intersects in terms of cultural perspective and its exploration of traditional Native American regalia. Recently, the National Endowment for the Arts recently announced Fields as a 2021 NEA National Heritage Fellow, the highest honor awarded in the folk and traditional arts. This is the first Artistic Innovations grant for 108 Contemporary.

InterUrban ArtHouse, Overland Park, Kansas

Grant: \$15,000

Project: Artists as Activists: Social Justice and Community Dialogs

Through its annual exhibition, InterUrban ArtHouse highlights issues of social justice, including racial, cultural, economic, gender, orientation, and ability inequity in the Kansas City region and nationally through the arts, and it also invites audiences in unifying, restorative conversations around these topics. The organization will create an open call for artists in Kansas and Missouri to create new works. This is the first Artistic Innovations grant for InterUrban ArtHouse.

Steve Parker, Austin, Texas

Grant: \$15,000

Project: FIGHT SONG

Drawing from Texas's obsession with football, artist Steve Parker will create FIGHT SONG, a project that will use the marching band to examine themes of labor, spectacle, and traumatic injury in college football. A music educator at the University of Texas–San Antonio, Parker will create the project in two parts: as a gallery exhibition and a public performance, combining drill team choreography, sonic meditation, wearable sonic headwear, elaborate pageantry, school fight songs and interactive marching band instrument sculptures. This is Parker's first Artistic Innovations grant, but he has been involved in two previous grant projects.

Mark Wittig, Little Rock, Arkansas

Grant: \$13,500

Project: Structures that Transformed Education

In his project, Wittig will create a study of the history of education to highlight the variations and similarities in educational systems throughout the United States. He will pair large format images with architectural sculptures of historic schools, like Little Rock's Central High School and Topeka's Summer and Monroe Elementary Schools. These places played a part in changing education in America. His project will culminate in an exhibition at the Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub in North Little Rock. This is Wittig's first Artistic Innovations grant.

About Mid-America Arts Alliance

Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) strengthens and supports artists, cultural organizations, and communities throughout our region and beyond. Additional information about M-AAA is available at <https://www.maaa.org/>.

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