



MID-AMERICA ARTS ALLIANCE

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Mid-America Arts Alliance Announces Artistic Innovations Grantees, Totaling More Than \$230,000 for Innovative Work in the Region

(Kansas City, MO) Mid-America Arts Alliance, a regional arts organization, today announces the FY2018 recipients for its esteemed Artistic Innovations grants, a program that supports individual artists and arts organizations for the creation of new artworks that result in public engagement. With generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Windgate Charitable Foundation, \$234,746 has been awarded to twenty-one projects in five states in our region: Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.

The Artistic Innovations program has been supporting the creation of groundbreaking new artistic work since 2013, with grants of up to \$15,000 to artists and arts organizations in member states creating a variety of art across mediums. This round of awards proves no different, with grants made in the disciplines of dance, music, film, theater, and visual art.

“Mid-America Arts Alliance is proud to support the 2018 Artistic Innovation awardees, which represent the diversity of experimentation, collaboration, and creative expression occurring throughout our region,” says Todd Stein, M-AAA CEO. “We are grateful for the continued support of the Windgate Charitable Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, whose vital funding supports our grantmaking to artists and arts organizations.”

Artist Olaniyi Rasheed Akindiya, or Akirash, wrote, “Now after a long process I can say YES to the dream of this project. *SASAO L’OJU EGUNGUN/BEHIND THE MASK* will be seeing the light of day, realized with the help of Mid-America Art Alliance. It is an honor to have been chosen. I can’t wait to start and to show the outcome to world.”

A detailed project description follows for each of the twenty-one awarded projects. The descriptions are organized by artistic medium.

DANCE

[Anuradha Naimpally](#) (Austin, TX)

***Dance for Global Goals* (\$3,000)**

In 2015, the United Nations put forward an initiative to achieve a list of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the year 2030. These seventeen Global Goals cover a range of basic human rights and environmental commitments, and this project seeks solutions to support the SDGs through dance, music, and multimedia. Bharata Natyam, an Indian traditional classical

dance, utilizes an elaborate gesture system for communication comprised of hand symbols, facial expressions, and body language. The final public performance by the artist and workshop participants will be accompanied by new musical compositions and narration by Nagavalli and Rajamani.

[ARCOS Dance](#) (Austin, TX)

***The Tower Is Us* (\$15,000)**

This transmedia performance presents an interactive narrative across multiple platforms, including a video game and a live multimedia dance-theater production. ARCOS premiered an initial experiment with the concept of transmedia performance, *Domain*, in mid-2016 on a tour to New Mexico, Missouri, Nebraska, Montana, and Texas. Positive response to the project from audiences and critics, and related experiments with dance for 360-degree video, served as catalysts to pursue creating this contemporary dance-driven video game.

[Cat Mahari](#) (Kansas City, MO)

***the solo mixtape series ...Violent/Break: Vol II* (\$6,500)**

The solo mixtape series: *Violent/Break Vol II* is an autobiographic, interdisciplinary exploration on violence and transcendence, featuring original composition and interactive media. A performance residency co-produced by 31st&Brklyn, a platform for contemporary performance and artists of color based in Kansas City, Missouri, will culminate in a four-show production October 26–29, 2017. *Vol II* arises from a practice of krump and chen taijiquan, culture and myth making, to forward AfroFuture visions of life pre-current world order of Antiblackness.

[METdance](#) (Houston, TX)

***Subtle Shifts* (\$15,000)**

Subtle Shifts is a new contemporary dance piece by Dominic Walsh, one of Houston's most celebrated and accomplished performers/choreographers. This new work will premiere and be presented throughout METdance's 2017–18 season, tentatively entitled *Where the Heart Is*, utilizing repertory and new works created by artists who have or currently reside in Houston, with *Subtle Shifts* anchoring this celebration of local dance talent.

[NobleMotion Dance](#) (Houston, TX)

***Structura: Dance Meets Design* (\$15,000)**

Structura will combine the ingenuity, calculation, and craftsmanship of industrial design professionals with contemporary dance to showcase the exciting possibilities of integrating tailor-made interactive structures in performance at the Hobby Center for Performing Arts in Houston. The performance consists of four sections, each featuring a different structure that offers surfaces for projection mapping and will be engineered as a dancer obstacle course, providing innovative ways to use quadrupedal movement, swinging, jumping, and vaulting. *Structura* will also include outreach programming for 9–17 years olds engaging with professional designers and choreographers in the construction of their own movement and structural designs.

FILM

[Kendell Harbin](#) (Kansas City, MO)

THE ROAMING CENTER FOR MAGNETIC ALTERNATIVES (RCMA) (\$5,246)

This lending library of over 300 VHS tapes and associated technologies will travel the M-AAA region to connect with outlying and underrepresented LGBTQIA communities. It is an emergent project exploring the correlation between LGBTQIA identified people, popular cinema, and a medium on the edge of obsolescence. The goal is to examine the role of archives, sharing economies, and self-made media in the larger project of raising awareness and promoting social equity within remote LGBTQIA populations.

[Lance McDaniel](#) (Oklahoma City, OK)

The Waving Wheat Trilogy (\$15,000)

This project is a collection of three short films that will leverage the power of modern dance, the beauty of Oklahoma's diverse landscape, and the talent of Oklahoma artists to tell authentic, timely stories about life in rural Oklahoma. The films will all be set and filmed in Alva, Oklahoma. Each film will focus on a different character from the same family. The films will be independent stories that also work together as a whole.

[Stephan Hillerbrand and Mary Magsamen](#) (Houston, TX)

Emergency Procedures (\$2,500)

Emergency Procedures is a multi-disciplinary project consisting of video, performance, and printed material that explores how we collectively and individually process tragic events that we feel are beyond our control. Drawing from contemporary and historical methods for survival in emergency situations, the project will highlight the striking similarities between the fear mongering typical of the 1950s, with its rhetoric of how "others" threaten the traditional American family and way of life, and the messages we experience today through constant media attention to volatile elections, gun violence, terrorism, financial insecurity, hate crimes, racial tension, and more.

[University of Central Arkansas](#) (Conway, AR)

Imagine If Buildings Could Talk: Mapping the History of Little Rock's Central High School National Historic Site (\$15,000)

This project is a two-day festival commemorating the ninety-year anniversary of the building of Little Rock's Central High School, hailed in 1927 as the most expensive, most beautiful, and largest high school in the nation, and the sixty-year anniversary of the integration of the school by the so-called Little Rock Nine on September 25, 1957, one of the defining moments in the history of the American Civil Rights Movement. The centerpiece of this festival is an eight-minute 3D, projection-mapped, animated video by Scott Meador and accompanying musical score composed and performed by Blake Tyson.

MUSIC

[COLLIDE](#) (Austin, TX)

GRACKLE CALL (\$15,000)

GRACKLE CALL is a performative audiovisual tour that immerses audiences in the roosting locations of the great-tailed grackle. Mimicking a birding experience, participants will be provided with binoculars, iPods, and a printed program guide that will direct them to

experimental performances, installations, radio stories, and soundscapes that examine the grackle in new ways. Following the project's premiere, a free, interactive iPhone app version of *GRACKLE CALL* will be available on the Soundyarn platform functioning as a dynamic archive of the live performance, and will play audio content that reacts to the user's GPS coordinates, velocity, and time of day. The app will direct the user to unique grackle roosting locations throughout the city.

[newEar Contemporary Chamber Ensemble](#) (Kansas City, MO)

***Celebrating Music from the Middle* (\$5,000)**

In honor of newEar's 25th anniversary, they will commission five new works for chamber ensemble premiering throughout the 2017–18 season. For the Mid-America Arts Alliance Artistic Innovations grant, they will fund one of these five commissions composed by Nick Omiccioli. newEar Contemporary Chamber Ensemble dedicates itself to commissioning and performing music of our time and providing listeners with unique and stimulating musical experiences that are rooted in artistic excellence and enhanced by educational opportunities.

[River Oaks Chamber Orchestra](#) (Houston, TX)

***Musical and Literary Ofrenda* (\$10,000)**

During Día de los Muertos, families create *ofrendas*, or altars, to remember and honor the memory of their ancestors. This project will present five short, original, classical compositions for the first time as musical *ofrendas* amongst the beautiful *retablos* on display at Houston's Lawndale Art Center. Between the musical interludes, Inprint writers will recite original compositions written in the tradition of making an offering to loved ones that have passed.

THEATER

[Artist's Laboratory Theatre](#) (Fayetteville, AR)

***Southside Community Performance Lab* (\$15,000)**

Over the course of nine months, the Southside Community Performance Lab from Artist's Laboratory Theatre (ALT) will produce three site-specific performances with the community members of Southside Fayetteville that raise awareness and initiate dialogue around issues identified by the neighborhood regarding livability and quality of life in the area. ALT will conduct a series of facilitated community conversations that will steer the focus of each performance, and ALT's ensemble of professional artists will co-design each event with community members. Each performance will be a unique collaboration that involves artists, neighbors, city officials, and other service organizations in the area.

[Cara Mía Theatre Co.](#) (Dallas, TX)

***Telling Our Stories* (\$10,000)**

Cara Mía Theatre will develop and produce a performance with storyteller Dr. Njoki McElroy and seven local residents of diverse racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds in six culturally and racially disparate neighborhoods in Dallas. Following each performance, a community conversation will take place with audiences and the performers on the power of storytelling as an opportunity for healing, leading to intercultural understanding and planting seeds for community transformation. Dr. McElroy, a Dallas resident, is a renowned storyteller and scholar with over forty years of experience in this area.

[The Coterie](#) (Kansas City, MO)

***IMAGINARY FRIENDS* (\$15,000)**

A team of fourteen Kansas City based—production artists plus nine professional actors will interpret and bring to the stage *IMAGINARY FRIENDS*, a new work of fantasy for teens, preteens, and families adapted by Laurie Brooks. A partnership with Children’s Mercy Hospital officials will serve to advise The Coterie on authentically sharing the story of teen cancer, as well as raise awareness through educational residencies. The source work is a short story centering on Jack, a young teen, who must face a demon alone. A diagnosis of cancer throws Jack into a parallel, hidden world within a heavily wooded park that borders his home.

[Great Plains Theatre Conference](#) (Omaha, NE)

***North Freeway* (working title) \$15,000**

With its Neighborhood Tapestries project, Great Plains Theatre Conference (GPTC) will commission a new play from community dialogue to be presented in May 2018 during GPTC’s PlayFest theatre festival. Over the twelve-month development period, the North Freeway project will explore the stories of north Omaha, a historically underserved African American community. Playwright Denise Chapman is a lifelong resident of north Omaha and grew up near the North Freeway. She has more than ten years of experience writing, directing, producing, and acting in the Omaha community. There will be a visual art exhibit of photos and historical artifacts to accompany the final performance of the play.

Sheryl Martin (Norman, OK)

***Oklahoma StoryWorks: The Food Project* (\$15,000)**

This project will be the first in a series of documentary projects created and produced by Oklahoma StoryWorks focusing on the lives and food-related issues of citizens of Norman, Oklahoma, and surrounding towns. After interviewing Oklahomans from all walks of life, Ms. Martin and four professional Oklahoma actors will lead a workshop with community members and further partner with community cultural organizations in Norman, Oklahoma, both non-profit and commercial, to create and perform *The Food Project*. Issues for exploration include: hunger and appetite in life and in literature; food and cooking traditions as practiced by Oklahomans of various ethnic backgrounds; food scarcity and insecurity in both urban and rural areas; and what happens when the Slow Food Movement meets the Oklahoma Public Schools Cafeteria.

VISUAL ART

[Aurora Picture Show](#) (Houston, TX)

***12 Gestures* (\$9,000)**

Aurora Picture Show requests funding for a six-channel, gender-bending video installation created and directed by Houston-based interdisciplinary artists Nick Vaughan and Jake Margolin. This work will feature members of Eastern Oklahoma’s drag community in a series of overtly political performances that will pair lip-synced renditions of political texts and music with task-element and durational actions. Following its Texas premiere, the artists will present *12 Gestures* in multiple locations in Oklahoma, including Tahlequah’s annual pride festival, TahlEquality. Each presentation will also be coupled with a live performance event featuring a number of the Oklahoma-based collaborators.

Classen Ten Penn Neighborhood Association (Oklahoma City, OK)

Classen Ten Penn Public Art Initiative (\$15,000)

The Classen Ten Penn street art initiative will employ between five to ten artists and four or five student artists through a public call for artists to create new and original works of public art in our neighborhood to solve specific and systemic problems the neighborhood faces, including, but not limited to, safety and public perception. Among the community partners are the City of Oklahoma City's Development Services Department, Public Works Department, and Parks and Recreation Department; Current Studio, an art organization in the neighborhood run by artist-curators Kelsey Karper and Romy Owens; and with students at the University of Oklahoma's (OU) School of Visual Art under the supervision of sculptor and professor Jonathan Hills.

George A. Spiva Center for the Arts (Joplin, MO)

Spiva Sketchbook Project (\$3,500)

M-AAA support will focus on the final stage of a year-long project through which eighty artists, ages eight to eighty, creatively and concurrently documented their thoughts, interests, hopes, and dreams. Artists have shared their progress throughout the year on a private Facebook page and during monthly workshops. Upon completion of the sketchbooks, scanning and posting of portfolios online and an exhibition of the materials will be held at the Spiva Regional Gallery.

OLANIYI RASHEED AKINDIYA (Pflugerville, TX)

SASHO L'OJU EGUN / Behind the Mask (\$15,000)

The Bahia people of Brazil and the Yoruba people of Nigeria both celebrate the Egungun Festival, a traditional religious ritual, where masqueraders dance in elaborate costumes. This project involves the creation of seven original masquerade costumes from traditional materials, incorporating symbols and patterns from cultures around the world including, but not limited to, Ghana (Adinkran), Nigeria (Uli, Arewa), South Africa (Ndebele), Cameroon (Bamuleke), Australia (Aboriginal), New Zealand (Mauri), and Mexico/New Mexico (Pueblo). These costumes will be worn and displayed as sculpture installation. The artist and six other dancers will collaborate on dance pieces to perform in public spaces wearing the masquerade costumes.

About Mid-America Arts Alliance

Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) strengthens and supports artists, cultural organizations, and communities throughout our region and beyond. We are especially committed to enriching the cultural life of historically underserved communities by providing high quality, meaningful, and accessible arts and culture programs and services. We believe in more art for more people. Additional information about M-AAA is available at www.maaa.org.

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