



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Sixty Bold Artists Shaping Today

Meet the 2021 USA Fellows—the storytellers, shapemakers, movement builders, and culture bearers practicing today.

At a moment of constant change, artists continue to inspire curiosity, empathy, and action toward building a more honest and just world. The 2021 Fellows were chosen for their bold artistic vision and significant impact. Each artist demonstrates generosity and care toward field-building that continues to inspire and propel their discipline.

These artists break disciplinary boundaries to challenge the status quo. Some are shapemakers—trailblazers and innovators who invite us to stretch our imaginations and see new possibilities in materials, form, and process. Others are storytellers who center that which has been forgotten, misrepresented, or untold by others. There are the culture bearers who recognize the importance of retaining ancestral knowledge and passing down their heritage to future generations. And finally, the movement builders who work in partnership with others to redefine community engagement, kinship, and activism. This cohort shows us that art-making of all kinds, and their cross-pollination, is critical to moving our culture forward.

Each artist generously shared how they are navigating the present moment and if they had insights to share with other makers. Read below to see what they had to say. Additionally, note that panelists' titles and organizations are reflective of their affiliation during the jury period in 2020.



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Architecture & Design

The Architecture and Design panel was juried by architect Thomas Kelley (2018 USA Fellow), public artist Amanda Williams (2018 USA Fellow), and critic and curator Mimi Zeiger.

Jennifer Bonner / MALL

She // Her // Hers

Architect

Portland, OR

[Headshot Description: Jennifer, a woman with blonde hair, stands with arms crossed wearing lemon-yellow glasses and a fake tuxedo shirt.]

Quote: My work is inspired by observations found in popular culture: sandwiches, color blocking, dollhouses, malls, gable roofs, best culture, and fake materials. While strolling through the mall is less possible at the moment, there is an abundance of visual imagery found online by browsing real estate photographs, Tik Tok accounts, virtual galleries, and e-commerce sites. I'm now creating my own cabinet of curiosities, storing away ideas for the next project.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Walter Hood

He // Him // His

Landscape and Public Artist

Oakland, CA

[Headshot Description: Walter smiles as he sits in a chair surrounded by concrete walls.]

Quote: I am currently engaged in work that presents different “futures” for people of color and those marginalized through institutional planning and paternalistic infrastructure. As my career has progressed, it has become clear to me that “we,” people of color in the US, are not represented in the future; that we exist only in the past. We need new, powerful expressions of the everyday and the mundane where we are present and prosperous.



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Olalekan Jeyifous

He // Him // His

Speculative Architect and Public Artist

Brooklyn, NY

[Headshot Description: Olalekan is seated against a dark chalkboard background with his hands clasped together in his lap. He is wearing a black t-shirt and dark blue jeans.]

Quote: I like to walk around my neighborhood in Crown Heights and the bordering Bed-Stuy and Fort Greene neighborhoods, taking photos of empty lots, alleyways, and rooftops. I then create photo-montages of a speculative Brooklyn Afro/Eco/Agro Futurist world.



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Craft

The Craft panel was juried by Fabio J. Fernández, Adjunct Professor at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Mia Hall, the Executive Director at Penland School of Craft, and Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy, the Assistant Curator at the Museum of Arts & Design.

Diedrick Brackens

He // Him // His

Weaver

Los Angeles, CA

[Headshot Description: Diedrick, a young Black man, tilts his head gently to one side and gazes at the camera. His face is half-immersed in shadow.]

Quote: I started running over the summer and rediscovering my love of this state park near where I live in Crenshaw called Kenneth Hahn. I took to learning the names of many native and non-native plants that line the trail there. It was one of the few activities that felt safe in an uncertain time, and I have an enduring fascination with nature.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Bisa Butler

She // Her // Hers

Portrait Quilter

West Orange, NJ

[Headshot Description: Bisa, an African American woman with long cascading locs, dark lipstick, and a bright printed dress stands in front of her quilt with an equally colorful portrait of an African woman with short, parted hair, hoop earrings, and a halter made of cowrie shells.]

Quote: These days many of us are isolated and feel as if we are powerless to fight unseen forces. I offer up the creation of art as part of the antidote. We can create art to reshape public perception and demand for a more humane world. Let artists take this time to beat back the despair and panic and create works that will make us more unified and compassionate.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Amber Cowan

She // Her // Hers

Glass Artist

Philadelphia, PA

[Headshot Description: Amber, a woman with long light brown hair, looks at the camera in front of white background. She is wearing a bright red sweater and blue shirt with white polka dots.]

Quote: Artists have a special dexterity for adapting to change, and the emergence of virtual artists talks, panels, and studio visits have united the arts community through this pandemic. This forum has kept me learning, connected and entertained throughout the past year. I have been able to share my studio and process to an unexpected new audience and really enjoyed getting a glimpse into other artist worlds.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Salvador Jiménez-Flores

He // Him // His

Interdisciplinary Artist and Ceramicist

Chicago, IL

[Headshot Description: Salvador, a Latinx man with dark wavy hair and a black mustache, stands against a green bush. He is wearing a mariachi suit without the hat.]

Quote: The crafts have been part of many human civilizations as a way to document life, celebrate life, and survive. Craft is ever relevant. It has been part of our past, it is part of our present, and will be part of our future. We are creatures who create for function, for food, for shelter, for beauty, and for self-expression. Craft is a form of resistance and acceptance; it helps us connect as humans.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Cannupa Hanska Luger

He // Him // His

Multidisciplinary Artist and Futurist

Glorieta, NM

[Headshot Description: Cannupa, an Indigenous person of Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota heritage with brown hair, brown eyes, and a mustache, stands in their studio in front of two life-sized buffalo figures wearing regalia made of crochet, felt, ceramic, and steel. Cannupa is wearing a red and grey crochet cape with knife-shaped turquoise earrings.]

Quote: As an artist who often works in social collaboration, I have returned to my studio practice and taken active steps to protect the health of my loved ones and our Indigenous communities who are being affected by this pandemic disproportionately. The gift I see emerge from this time is that so many of us can be home with family after years of travel and engagement in the public realm.



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Tiff Massey

She // Her // Hers

Interdisciplinary Artist

Detroit, MI

[Headshot Description: Tiff, a young Black woman, is heavily adorned by the jewelry she created and rocking a du-rag, gold beads, and a floral dress. She holds her glasses as she gazes into the camera.]

Quote: What's important to me more than ever before is space. I purchased a building in March, days before the global shut down, to create artist studios, a gallery, and a residency in the city of Detroit called What Up Doe Studios. This is my special place in town. This building will forever be a place where creativity is nurtured.



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Erin M. Riley

They // Them // Theirs, She // Her // Hers

Tapestry Weaver

Brooklyn, NY

[Headshot Description: Erin, a 35-year-old with pale skin, freckles, green eyes, and dark brown hair, looks into the camera in natural light.]

Quote: As the days of 2020 crept by, I felt more empowered to stay in the studio and decline social engagements. I began reaching out to other artists in more intimate ways. I attended group meetings with textile artists to fundraise for causes, exchanged pictures from the studio with artists I admire, and traded books and letters via the mail.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Dance

The Dance panel was juried by Lili Chopra, the Executive Director of Artistic Programs at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, dancer and choreographer d. Sabela grimes (2014 USA Fellow), and Tara Aisha Willis, the Associate Curator of Performance & Public Practice at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Ishmael Houston-Jones

Pronoun: Ishmael

Choreographer, Author, Curator, and Educator

New York, NY

[Headshot Description: Ishmael, a man with a gray goatee and wearing a lavender bandana on his head, smiles warmly.]

Quote: I want to believe in the transformative power of art; that art can bring about real change in the human condition. This belief has informed much of my work and my processes. I want to believe I can change this world for the better. And, being an artist, art is the only tool I have with which to do this.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

JanpiStar

She // Her // Hers, He // Him // His, They // Them // Theirs

Dancer and Drag Queen

Oakland, CA

[Headshot Description: JanpiStar, a wheelchair user with light brown skin, close-cut dark hair, and an athletic build, smiles and poses with their right upper limb in front of their chest, hand flexed. They wear neon green gauge earrings, a coral tank top, and green leggings.]

Quote: Breathing exercises and practicing yoga are two activities that have helped me connect with myself and my practice as a dancer this year.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Emily Johnson

She // Her // Hers

Choreographer and Body-Based Artist

New York, NY

[Headshot Description: Emily, a Yup'ik woman with long dark hair, wears a black v-neck shirt and pointed earrings against a dark background.]

Quote:

I've been working within a thought process called Architecture of the Overflow, which asks: How do we develop a new model of future-focused, community-determined creative action that moves forward from a performed moment, into our collective futures? My goal is to craft a replicable yet locally-responsive structure that centers Indigeneity and encourages collective community self-determination for the ways this work—and the relationships it builds—can broaden, deepen and serve equity and justice.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Cynthia Oliver

She // Her // Hers

Choreographer and Performer

Urbana, IL

[Headshot Description: Cynthia stands in profile extending an arm behind her to hold and display the skirt of her long, flower-printed dress designed and crafted by Robert Young.]

Quote: I connect back to myself by walking every day. I am fortunate to live near a couple of parks. I get out, breathe fresh air, and walk for miles daily. It is my sanity during this time. It also connects me to my late-father with whom I used to walk quite a lot. It clears my head and helps me think spaciouly.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Ni' Ja Whitson

They // Them // Theirs

Multidisciplinary Artist, Performer, and Writer

Los Angeles, CA

[Headshot Description: Ni' Ja, a stylish Nonbinary Trans person with long locs draped over their left shoulder and wearing a black fedora, stands against an empty white wall and tilts slightly to the right. In a white long-sleeve button-up dress shirt, black and grey pants, they look directly at the camera.]

Quote: I have been walking and hiking, for multiple miles most days, to move beyond the insides of the inside—the four walls of my home. I have been taking myself on long wanderings to look for the quiet noise or see something strange. When I am the most present, I feel time. When I am the most blessed, I hear a hawk cry.



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Film

The Film panel was juried by Shari Frilot, the Chief Curator of New Frontier at Sundance Institute, documentary filmmaker Elaine McMillion Sheldon (2018 USA Fellow), and Bryce Norbitz, the Director of Scripted Programming at Tribeca Film Institute.

Faren Humes

She // Her // Hers, They // Them // Theirs

Filmmaker

Miami, FL

[Headshot Description: Faren, a Black person, adorned with a floral headscarf, looks intently at the camera while standing amongst a public square at dusk; polychromatic lens flares abound.]

Quote: I am reminded of myself by engaging in durational acts throughout the day. Turning trails into personal labyrinths, biking handless for interminable bouts of time, sitting with stillness until the void animates, sweeping until the strokes merge with my own bodily syncopations; all frequent sources of escape and expansion.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Macha Colón

She // Her // Hers

Undisciplined Creator

San Juan, PR

[Headshot Description: Macha Colón, a light-skinned Afro Puerto Rican with purple dyed curly hair, smiles at the camera. She stands at the beach with the ocean behind her.]

Quote: For years, I've enjoyed taking a moment to appreciate clouds. I call it my meditation. I usually take photos but never share them. During the last few months, I've felt that my newsfeed needed a content oasis. So, I decided to share my photos of clouds through my social networks. To my surprise, everyone appreciated it, and now I receive, almost daily, cloud photos from friends and family.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Stephen Maing

He // Him // His

Documentary Filmmaker

New York, NY

[Headshot Description: Stephen, an Asian-American man with shoulder-length black hair, glasses, and a dark shirt.]

Quote: The last year of anxiety and uncertainty left very little of our former lives unburdened, in fact, mostly waylaid by the constraints of survival, so I've been grateful for a few chances to explore pockets of the outer boroughs with my young daughter. In a forgotten corner of Charles Memorial Park in Queens, the years of beach drift and erosion are a quiet but powerful reminder to try and pause, be more present, and intuit more generously—especially in a year that often suggested otherwise.



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Darius Clark Monroe

He // Him // His

Filmmaker

Brooklyn, NY

[Headshot Description: Darius, a Black man with cropped hair, wearing a blue-jean shirt, stands contemplatively upon a balcony in profile surrounded by plush green trees, looking out into the distance.]

Quote: Be patient, extremely patient with yourself. Be kind to yourself. Be gracious to yourself. The need to produce, exhaust oneself, meet deadlines—all of those things do not matter. Although I've continued to create, I've rejected being constrained by this ridiculous push to return to normal. I'm embracing my understanding of this new reality. I've learned to take naps. Turn off the tv and phone. Go on long walks. I've decided to finally put my mental, spiritual, and physical well-being as a priority, and I advise fellow creatives to do the same.



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Naima Ramos-Chapman

She // Her // Hers, They // Them // Theirs

Filmmaker

Brooklyn, NY

[Headshot Description: Naima poses for a self-portrait with a direct gaze, camera in hand, and wearing an olive green collared shirt.]

Quote: I practice togetherness by exploring the connective tissue that Black people have to dream into existence to keep the idea of family together. Right now, I am doing this with my own family. I edit images that I am consistently and constantly taking of them.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Jennifer Reeder

She // Her // Hers

Filmmaker

Chicago, IL and Hammond, IN

[Headshot Description: Jennifer, a woman with pale skin, long dark hair, and bangs, sits at the bottom of a narrow red staircase. Her hair blows around from an unseen source. She is looking at the camera with green, red and blue lights speckled across her face and torso. She is wearing a black jacket and no less than five necklaces.]

Quote: My "studio" is the window facing the end of the long farm table in the middle room of the house I share with my three young children, two cats, one cattle dog, and a forty-year-old box tortoise. I think best at home; I write best at home; I map out the path to the next film best at home. This house is loved and lived in. It's not quaint or quiet here. I practice "togetherness" every day here in this house with my family.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Media

The Media panel was juried by designer Carmen Aguilar y Wedge (2019 USA Fellow), artist and researcher Salome Asega, and Zachary Kaplan, the Executive Director at Rhizome.

Morehshin Allahyari

She // Her // Hers

Media Artist, Activist, and Writer

Brooklyn, NY

[Headshot Description: Morehshin, a young Iranian woman with straight dark hair, sits on a staircase. She is wearing a black leather dress with silver and black earrings.]

Quote: I left Iran in 2007 at the age of 22 on a single entry student visa. I have spent very little time with my family in the last decade. This year, I spent 3 months at my mother's house with my sister. We took care of each other, cooked for each other, laid down on bed many afternoons and talked, watched old videos of our house in Iran, and more. I felt 'home' in a way I have never felt as an adult.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Stephanie Dinkins

She // Her // Hers, They // Them // Theirs

New Media Artist

Brooklyn, NY

[Headshot Description: Stephanie, a black woman of medium brown complexion, smiles broadly. She has shoulder length dark brown locks and wears a sheer pale blue shirt with flowers.]

Quote: I have recently discovered the magic of staying in place. I was on the go for about three years straight. It has been a luxury to get reacquainted with my thoughts, my people, my home, and my community.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Lauren Lee McCarthy

She // Her // Hers, They // Them // Theirs

Performance Artist

Los Angeles, CA

[Headshot Description: Lauren, a Chinese-American woman with short dark hair and a black collared shirt smiles at the camera.]

Quote: Feeling completely disconnected, I created *TALKING IS DANGEROUS*, trying to break through it. Showing up on doorsteps, I delivered a monologue via phone screen and text-to-speech. I explained that I just heard masks and six-feet are not safe enough because when you speak, tiny particles fly through the masks at high velocity. They've recommended we stop talking to each other; they say talking is dangerous. So I made an alternative. I invited each person to visit a URL on their phone to continue the conversation. Over the months, we have learned to say things via text that perhaps we couldn't in a more embodied way.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Mother Cyborg

She // Her // Hers

Multimedia Artist, Educator, and Organizer

Detroit, MI

[Headshot Description: Mother Cyborg, a young Latin woman with shoulder-length black hair, poses in front of a colorful street wall in cyborg-like white shades, a black sleeveless T-shirt, and neon colored printed arm bands.]

Quote: When the pandemic first began, calling attention to the things that we rely on and take for granted – including supply chains and utility services – I sought grounding in the intelligent technologies of nature. I rediscovered small-scale farming and started a community-supported farm box share. While the country was locked down and most social life relegated outdoors, I opened my backyard for flower harvesting. My garden, like an Internet-connected mesh network, is a site for reconnection.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Music

The Music panel was juried by Kate Dumbleton, the Executive and Artistic Director at the Hyde Park Jazz Festival and an Associate Professor at School of the Art Institute of Chicago, composer David Lang (2015 USA Fellow), and singer-songwriter Lourdes Pérez (2006 USA Fellow).

Martha Gonzalez

She // Her // Hers

Chicana Musician and Artivista

Los Angeles, CA

[Headshot Description: Martha poses in front of a lime green wall in a long white dress, caramel blazer, cat eye glasses, and jewelry. She is a Chicana woman with tan skin, short black hair, and a warm smile.]

Quote: A song as a sonic and literary manifestation is life's soundscape, a unique, cathartic memento as well as a powerful political tool. A person's *testimonio*, life views, triumphs, aphorisms, and struggles can be expressed in song lyrics. When practiced in community, songwriting can be a powerful exercise in consensus building and collective knowledge production. The pandemic made me revisit this process via Zoom. It has been fun, rewarding, and keeps me connected to my students and community!



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Edward "Kidd" Jordan

He // Him // His

Jazz Musician, Saxophonist, and Educator

New Orleans, LA

[Headshot Description: Edward "Kidd", a Black man with gray hair, a printed t-shirt, jeans, and his glasses low on his nose, sits holding his saxophone.]

Quote: My wife, kids, and I are always playing, singing, listening to, and talking about music. Music is how we think about life. It's the discipline of doing something that keeps you looking forward to the next thing. We distance of course, but we still enjoy talking, sharing, and eating. That's a New Orleans thing. Our culture is our life, so we continue to be who we are with restrictions.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Tomeka Reid

She // Her // Hers

Cellist, Composer, Bandleader, and Organizer

Chicago, IL

[Headshot Description: Tomeka, wearing a dark blue turtleneck and skirt, smiles warmly while posing with a cello outside during the fall.]

Quote: Be gentle with yourself. Be flexible. Be forgiving. Be patient. But also allow yourself space to be upset, confused, disenchanted. This moment is both devastating and enlightening. Don't force yourself or beat up on yourself if you feel you can't do it at the moment. Listen to your body and take as much care as possible. Love is really all there is.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Wadada Leo Smith

He // Him // His

Creative Composer and Trumpeter

New Haven, CT

[Headshot Description: Wadada, wearing a black shirt and slacks, is seated while holding a trumpet. In the background, just out of focus, a portrait of Louis Armstrong hangs on the wall.]

Quote: Creativity is a reflection on the quality of who you are, and one's ability to dig deeper within themselves and connect with the environment. For me, I am a reflective person and I am affected by what I read, personal experiences, and my dream state. I shut down one week before the national shutdown and immediately started to work on String Quartet #13, 14, and 15, and Ankhramation symbolic scores.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Mazz Swift

She // Her // Hers

Violinist, Composer, and Conductor

Brooklyn, NY

[Headshot Description: Mazz, a chocolate-complexioned woman stares defiantly into the camera as she holds an acoustic violin in one hand, drawn back as if to shoot it like an arrow, and an electric violin in her front hand, aimed directly at the camera, like a bow.]

Quote: Practicing mindfulness helps me understand how to improvise and, through improvisation, learn to trust myself, trust what happens, and trust that the process in place is the right process for right now. It's what allows me to be free. Free from shoulds, from being "right," and from the delusion that I am-, this is-, we are- not enough. It allows me to *be*.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Theater & Performance

The Theater & Performance panel was juried by Hayley Finn, the Associate Artistic Director at the Playwrights' Center, performance artist Malik Gaines (2018 USA Fellow), and Jocelyn Prince, a Lecturer in Theater and Performance Studies at Northwestern University.

Jibz Cameron

She // Her // Hers

Performer

Los Angeles, CA

[Headshot Description: Jibz, a middle aged queer white woman with brown hair and glasses, wearing a powder blue sweatshirt by the artist Pippa that says "Bad in Bed."]

Quote: The rage, despair, and hopelessness I feel regarding violence and injustice towards women, people of color, queers, animals, the planet, and children, are not feelings I know how to express in everyday life. The stage is a utopian space rife with possibility for expressing these truths. In this way, particularly in the current moment when people seem more disassociated from each other and themselves than ever, live performance seems almost a radical act.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Carmelita Tropicana

She // Her // Hers

Playwright and Performer

New York, NY

[Headshot Description: Alina, an older woman with short hair, smiles. She is wearing a shiny blue jacket and small silver hoop earrings.]

Quote: I was given roses by my friend, their beauty sustains me in pandemic times. Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Native American environmentalist, had a great idea. She proposes to change the pronoun “it” when referring to living things. Using “ki” singular and “kin” plural when referring to living things will change our thinking. We will have more respect. Mi roses, my kin fill me with joy and beauty.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Christopher Chen

He // Him // His

Playwright

San Francisco, CA

[Headshot Description: Christopher, a playwright, gazes off-camera outside in New York during Play Company's production of *CAUGHT*.]

Quote: One of my favorite places in the world is Lands End, near my home in San Francisco. It's one of the few places I allow myself to go these days where I encounter numbers of other strangers (all masked, mostly). Encountering these strangers who have been pulled, along with me, to the sacred beauty of nature reminds me of the spiritual pulse in other human beings in this time of division and isolation.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Sandra Delgado

She // Her // Hers

Playwright and Actor

Chicago, IL

[Headshot Description: Sandra, a woman in her forties with olive skin, dark brown curly hair, and light brown eyes, clasps her hands near her face and smiles at the camera.]

Quote: Be kind to yourself. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Know that the emotional and energy highs and lows are normal. There are days you will want to create and others when you want to curl up in bed. Both are okay. Both are necessary. Listen to your body. Connect to nature as often as you can. Call someone you've been thinking about. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Be kind to yourself.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Idris Goodwin

He // Him // His

Breakbeat Poet and Playwright

Colorado Springs, CO

[Headshot Description: Idris, a Black man with a beard, smiles broadly with teeth and everything. He is wearing a black collard shirt.]

Quote: These days I am trying to walk and make inside my values. I have six core values that drive and ground me. In these very anxious days, it provides a grounding and clarity around where to best position my creative energy.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Mia Katigbak

She // Her // Hers

Actor and Manager

New York, NY

[Headshot Description: Mia, an Asian American with short black hair, is wearing a black scoop-necked shirt against a light background. She stands with her arms crossed in front of her.]

Quote: What might usually be drudgery is now a creative release. Newfound time went to home improvements. Then fashioning a space for work when I went to my mother's to shelter together. I am learning her recipes from the Philippines and cooking for us. There is the continued pleasure of learning a piece of music to sing with my niece on Christmas. We hope to continue the family tradition of spending the holidays together.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Karen Zacarías

She // Her // Hers

Playwright and Activist

Washington, DC

[Headshot Description: Karen, a Latina woman of Mexican descent with shoulder-length blonde and brown hair and wearing earrings, a necklace, and burgundy sweater, smiles at the camera.]

Quote: My father's work as a public health official during the AIDS epidemic has greatly influenced my work as an artist. The way my father improved lives was not to focus on a cure, but to shift a culture of fear, shame, and indifference to that of compassion and commitment. Public health is about creating a stage for dialogue that invites change. It is about changing the misperceptions of a population. This is why I am a playwright. I want to be part of the change that sees all people's stories as worthy.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Traditional Arts

The Traditional Arts panel was juried by Francene Blythe, the Director of Programs at the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko, the Director at the Illinois State Museum, and Leia Maahs, the Managing Director at the Southwest Folklife Alliance.

Ofelia Esparza

She // Her // Hers

Altarista (Altar-maker)

East Los Angeles, CA

[Headshot Description: Ofelia, a Chicana elder woman with her white hair tied back with colorful Guatemalan textile headband, dons beaded huichol flower earrings, a black-corded medicine bag hanging from her neck, and a hand-loomed strap from a shoulder bag crosses her chest. She wears a black huipil with hand embroidered white flowers and olive green embroidered leaves. She looks up as she smiles, set in front of an out-of-focus hedge at Grand Park in Los Angeles Civic Center.]

Quote: During this pandemic, I have found myself back at my beginnings as an artist, working with what I have available to me at home. Throughout the years I have collected many found objects and handmade items that I cannot part with. Many have ended up as part of small vignettes or assemblages in my garden, where I spend most of my time. I find this activity to be essential to my creativity and sustainability.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Nathan P. Jackson

He // Him // His

Traditional Woodcarver and Sculptor

Ketchikan, AK

[Headshot Description: Nathan, a Tlingit man with tan skin and white hair, smiles warmly.]

Quote: Saxman Native Village is a special place to me as it has been a place for me to carve for the past 35 years, doing projects for the Totem Park there and the Tribal House. It's special to me because every summer they have tours, where I can share my culture with visitors from all over the U.S., and even worldwide. This year was very different as there were no tours whatsoever, too quiet.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Basil Kincaid

Pronoun: Basil

Quilter, Ritualist, and Healer

St. Louis, MO

[Headshot Description: Basil, an African American, is pictured from the waist up, smiling, standing in front of one of Basil's quilt works, which hangs on the wall behind the artist. The hanging work is a myriad of colors. Basil is also wearing a quilt, another one of Basil's works, which is draped over Basil's body exposing one of Basil's shoulders.]

Quote: I'm overjoyed to share that I've relocated my studio from St. Louis to Ghana this year. And, I am currently settling into this place that I now call home. I decided to make this move just before the pandemic plagued the world, which slightly delayed my move date, but the promise of this solace was a guiding light through the spring, summer, and fall. So while I wouldn't call this new home a surprise, I'm certainly discovering it every day.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Kawika Lum-Nelmida

He // Him // His

Hawaiian Feather Artist

Honolulu, HI

[Headshot Description: Kawika stands against the Ewa/Waipio plains on O‘ahu. He is wearing a ‘I‘iwi aloha shirt and dark glasses.]

Quote: During this time, I have been able to give a refined focus on my cultural practice. For myself, this is the perfect time to research and experiment on techniques and skills. This time has also given me more one-on-one time with students. Use this time to refine and focus your art, and find creative ways to connect with your students.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Carolyn L. Mazloomi

She // Her // Hers

Quilter

West Chester, OH

[Headshot Description: Carolyn, an African American woman with short natural hair, wears a purple shawl, turquoise rings, and smiles at the camera.]

Quote: Making art has sustained and nourished me while cocooning at home and not being able to see my beloved grandchildren. Whereas I cannot see them, I decided to use their images in a new series of quilts. The work makes me feel closer to them.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Geo Soctomah Neptune

They // Them // Theirs

Basketry Artist and Performer

Motahkomikuk, ME

[Headshot Description: Geo, a light-skinned indigenous person, looks into the camera. Traditional markings are tattooed on their forehead and chin, and their shaved head is adorned with feathers. They have a light beard and dramatic makeup, and are wearing earrings made from tusk shells and porcupine quills. Their clothing is decorated in a tusk shell butterfly pattern.]

Quote: My art is so deeply connected to my relationship with [my grandmother] that it has been so difficult to pick up her tools and weave again—but I know she would want me to, so I do. She wouldn't want me to hold back, either—so I won't. I feel that the way I embody creativity has changed so much in the pandemic, and in the wake of my grandmother making her journey—I have changed. My art is changing and will blossom like it never has before.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Delina White

She // Her // Hers

Native American Fashion Designer, Jewelry Maker, and Beadwork Artist

Walker, MN

[Headshot Description: Delina, a woman with short hair and pink lipstick, smiles slightly. She is wearing a purple turtleneck, dangling earrings, and a pendant necklace.]

Quote: To my surprise, connecting with people through video calls has been a new, easy process that I really appreciate. I believe it's going to be more acceptable in the future as a necessary accessibility, since being in the office is not always necessary. This new way of communicating has brought many people together and work can get done effectively and efficiently from wherever you are. I have become comfortable with the process during this time.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Visual Art

The Visual Art panel was juried by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, the Chief Curator at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Laura Mott, the Senior Curator of Contemporary Art and Design at the Cranbrook Art Museum, and Lumi Tan, the Curator at The Kitchen.

Njideka Akunyili Crosby

She // Her // Hers

Painter and Mixed Media Artist

Los Angeles, CA

[Headshot Description: Njideka, a Black woman with short dark hair, stands against a white background. She wears an emerald green top, yellow dangling earrings and smiles slightly at the camera.]

Quote: The garden has been a surprise discovery for me [during this time] because I was never a plant person. One of the first things I do each morning after waking up is to walk around the garden and observe all the little changes in each plant. Taking care of my plants has been a great avenue for self-care as well as a time marker in this period.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Lex Brown

She // Her // Hers

Multimedia Poet and Performer

Philadelphia, PA

[Headshot Description: Lex, a young Black woman with medium-brown skin, sits facing the setting sun on a cloudy day. Her hair is dark, in two plaits, and she wears a chunky-knit red sweater. She gives her best beguiling Mona Lisa smile.]

Quote: For some, this has been a time of meditation. For others, a time of displacement and violated human rights. Most, including myself, have lost someone. But there is a beauty to the omnipotence of this unrelenting experience. There is nowhere to hide from the truth. For me, it meant releasing a crumbling foundation of negative situations and thought patterns. I rebuilt with a greater sense of alignment and renewal of solid belief that was missing for years.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

rafa esparza

He // Him // His

Multidisciplinary Artist

Los Angeles, CA

[Headshot Description: rafa, a man with blonde hair, brown skin, and a black mustache, looks sidelong at the camera. He wears a sea foam green shirt with a dark green collar.]

Quote: It's important to create an opportunity for an embodied investigation where I can be connected to people and to land wherever I work. This form of address gestures towards a method of building a relationship to space out in the open, in such that an audience can reflect upon their own relationship to the site and the work.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Maria Gaspar

She // Her // Hers

Interdisciplinary Artist

Chicago, IL

[Headshot Description: Maria, a Latinx person of Mexican-American descent, sits in her Pilsen, Chicago studio. In the backdrop of the photo are her sketches and drawing for works in progress. She wears turquoise earrings and a navy blue blouse.]

Quote: As an artist, mother, and teacher, I've been thinking about the ways that womyn in my life are constantly creating and how making is embodied in all facets of our lives. The process of art making is not exclusive to the production of art objects. What has been explicit to me during this time is that caring for my elders, drawing with my child, or teaching young artists includes boundless acts of creativity.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Sharon Hayes

She // Her // Hers

Multidisciplinary Artist

Philadelphia, PA

[Headshot Description: Sharon, a middle-aged white queer woman with wavy brown and gray hair, stands in a gallery space in which an artwork is being installed. She is wearing a long shirt with wide black and red horizontal stripes and a camera strap diagonally across her chest. She looks at the camera and is smiling; her right hand is in her pocket, and her left forearm is behind her back.]

Quote: I heard someone recommend, in these unpredictable days, you should ground yourself in routine but I find it more helpful to embrace unstructured time. Follow a track for days on end; fall off into a ditch and lose my way; throw myself into some urgent collective activity; play a board game with my kid; read the same email five times in a row; stay up late doing something that could take far less time. In unstructured time, I find things I didn't know I was looking for.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Carolyn Lazard

They // Them // Theirs

Multidisciplinary Artist

Philadelphia, PA

[Headshot Description: A close-up view of a line drawing in black pen on brown-toned paper in a light wooden frame. The drawing is of a person with textured curly hair resting in bed while looking at an Apple brand laptop. The figure lays on a pillow with their head propped up by their hand. Their face is mostly obscured by the laptop revealing only one eye. Their body is covered in a blanket. The folds of the blanket take up half of the surface of the drawing.]

Quote: I do the creative practice of everyday life before, during, and hopefully, after the pandemic. That means everything I do is creative. Art is not some sequestered activity: it extends from and is a part of living. Survival under white supremacist capitalist conditions requires creative ingenuity, and, most of all, it requires each other.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Daniel Lind-Ramos

He // Him // His

Assemblage Sculptor and Painter

Loíza, Puerto Rico

[Headshot Description: Daniel, a Black Puerto Rican 67-year-old man stands in his studio entrance. He wears a black shirt and looks at the camera.]

Quote: In this contemporary pandemic scenario, drawing is a strong medium of expression that can grasp the current pathos of this world situation and help provide a space for personal healing. Where we all, after recovering back our natural impulse for drawing, could, through the creation of symbolic images, exorcise our fears and anxieties, or chant to the human spirit of solidarity that has always prevailed in catastrophic times in the history of humanity.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Aki Sasamoto

She // Her // Hers

Installation and Performance Artist

New York, NY

[Headshot Description: Aki, a Japanese woman with medium length black hair, stands by an empty shelf space in an old Japanese apartment building. She has a big smile and is wearing a loose sweatshirt with bold colorful prints.]

Quote: Though shifting my work to be presented in the virtual space felt daunting and compromising, this pandemic offers a unique opportunity to recalibrate what the process or studio means to makers. I was approached by the Japan Society to use their online gallery to think about the process, so I made performance attempts in collaboration with my graduate students. It was a surprise educational space for students, presenters, certainly for me, and hopefully even for viewers.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Writing

The Writing panel was juried by Brigid Hughes, the Editor at *A Public Space*, Don Share, the Editor at *POETRY Magazine*, and novelist Jacqueline Woodson

Alexander Chee

He // Him // His

Novelist and Essayist

Bradford, VT

[Headshot Description: Alexander, a mixed race Korean American man of 53, is dressed in a navy cable-knit sweater and dress shirt. The wallpaper behind him is charcoal and black, and his face is lit by the sun coming from the window.]

Quote: There's a fortune-telling practice Evangelical Methodists used, bibliomancy—I first read about it in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. You ask a question of God, close your eyes and flip the Bible open, running your finger down the page, and where it is compelled to stop, that is your answer. But I do that with my library, choosing 7 quotes at random, writing down the quotes, and there's always a message for me.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Eve L. Ewing

She // Her // Hers

Writer and Scholar

Chicago, IL

[Headshot Description: Eve, a light skinned Black woman, leans forward, smiling slightly and looking off camera. Her dark brown hair is braided close to her head and she has on bright red lipstick and a high-collared button-up shirt. She is wearing winged eyeliner and has freckles.]

Quote: As a writer, I'm sort of always "making in place," especially because a sense of place plays such a huge role in my work. What's been special is being home rather than on the road—building routines, walking my dog, and paying more attention to the parks and open lands near where I live, being grateful for those, and having time to be there and be slow.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Honorée Fanonne Jeffers

She // Her // Hers

Poet and Writer

Norman, OK

[Headshot Description: Honorée, a milk chocolate-brown Black woman with chin-length, curly black hair, wears light pink glasses, geometric earrings, and a navy dress with tiny white polka dots.]

Quote: Do not be afraid of talking to yourself. This has been a very difficult year for me, a year of loneliness and isolation. However, once I embraced that I couldn't change reality, I discovered a deeper exploration of my art, through an abundance of verbal self-reflection. During the pandemic, I stopped having so much fear.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Elizabeth McCracken

She // Her // Hers

Multi-genre Writer

Austin, TX

[Headshot Description: Elizabeth, a middle-aged white woman with shoulder-length curly brown hair, smiles gently while wearing red lipstick, a beaded necklace, and a dark colored top.]

Quote: I work best when I'm full of delusions of grandeur. Lately, I've achieved this by getting up to swim at dawn at Barton Springs, the enormous spring-fed pool in the center of Austin. It's 68 degrees year-round, so when it's cold, steam rises off the surface. The sun comes up. There are a dozen swimmers or so. I am the slowest and pudgiest and smuggest. It reminds me there's beauty in the world.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Dunya Mikhail

She // Her // Hers

Poet and Writer

Sterling Heights, MI

[Headshot Description: Dunya, an Iraqi-American person with long brown hair and wearing a navy blue dress with earrings, smiles at the camera.]

Quote: Social distancing does not mean to be socially distant. This pandemic reminds us how much we humans need each other. I am of course looking forward to our three-dimensional world where we meet people face to face, including those kind strangers who come to readings and ask questions. Meanwhile, it's an opportunity to adjust ourselves to online platforms that take us everywhere from home.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Natalie Y. Moore

She // Her // Hers

Author, Journalist, and Playwright

Chicago, IL

[Headshot Description: Natalie, a Black woman with dark loose curls, stands outside with greenery in the background. She is wearing a sleeveless dress with a black scoop neck and aqua-blue drop earrings. She has a slight smile and is wearing purple-reddish lip gloss.]

Quote: One of my virtual backgrounds is Aretha Franklin’s “Who’s Zoomin’ Who” album cover for a bit of levity. I know most of us are tired of Zoom—ready to ditch the virtual gatherings and be in person. But these Zoom calls have kept me connected to friends, family, and collaborators while sheltering at home. I’ve been able to test out new material, toast friends’ achievements, and feel some semblance of togetherness.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Danez Smith

They // Them // Theirs

Poet and Writer

Minneapolis, MN

[Headshot Description: Danez, a young Black person with a short high top fade, smiling with all their teeth. They are wearing a green shirt, a multi-colored tank top, a gold necklace, and a wristwatch.]

Quote: Risk. Dig. Pry open. Try. The world feels like another world to me, so I'm trying to make whatever I can, however I can, 'cause who knows what and how and when "after this" this gonna be, what normal will look like, what it ever was. If your life is not demanding your creative energy to survive the moment, I think now is much a fertile time to break new ground, and grow your own rules and ways.



BELIEVE IN ARTISTS

Ocean Vuong

He // Him // His

Poet and Writer

Northampton, MA

[Headshot Description: Ocean, a Vietnamese-American man with black undercut-styled hair, is wearing a striped shirt and single dangling earring as he looks at the camera.]

Quote: If the process is not fruitful for you, if the work itself is not coming, give yourself permission to step away and immerse yourself deeper into your world. Living in deep awareness and attention to your world, your life, the people around you, all this is part of the work—perhaps even more substantial, though unquantifiable, than the work itself.