



CALI CATALYST

2022 Grantees

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ABOUT CENTER FOR CULTURAL INNOVATION

Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) was founded in 2001 as a California 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. Its mission is to support individuals in the arts—artists, culture bearers, and creative entrepreneurs—to realize greater self-determination so as to unfetter their productivity, free expression, and social impact, which contributes to shaping our collective national identity in ways that reflect the diversity of society.

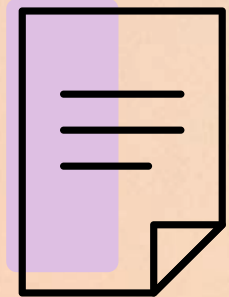
In addition, by acting as a cross-sector incubator with an informed point of view, CCI advances efforts to improve conditions for artists and all those who share artists' conditions of low wages, high debt, and too-few assets.

For more information about CCI, visit cciarts.org.

ABOUT CALI CATALYST

CALI Catalyst provides unrestricted grants of up to \$5,000 to California changemakers who are shifting the arts and culture sector in ways that tangibly give underrepresented voices more power and influence.

In 2021, CCI launched the California Art Leadership Investments (CALI) Catalyst grant program, which supports artists and arts workers who are on the frontlines of effecting greater inclusion, access, diversity, and equity in the arts and culture sector. Through bold actions, these individuals are tangibly helping underrepresented communities—including Black, Indigenous, people of color, LGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities—gain more influence and power in the arts and culture sector. We consider these bold actions to be “change-making” because they are visibly moving the needle for underrepresented communities to have more influence and power at an industry-wide level.

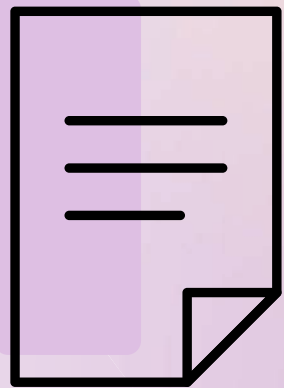


The CALI Catalyst grant program is made possible with support from:

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

CALI CATALYST

2022 Grantees



The CALI Catalyst program awarded 20 grants in its second year. Grants were made to California artists and arts workers who applied as individuals or teams.

ELAZAR ABRAHAM

Individual, San Joaquin County



Elazar Abraham. Stockton, CA 2020.
Photo by Shannon Lea Rock, Preserve Studio

[Website](#)

Elazar Abraham is mobilizing efforts to develop sustainable bases of power and wealth generation practices that benefit Stockton's artists.

Elazar Abraham is an artist, co-founder, and current Executive Director of HATCH Workshop, a community center and maker space in Stockton. After the 2008 recession and subsequent 2012 bankruptcy of Stockton, the City's arts endowment was lost. In the years that followed, the land was consolidated by a small handful of developers and as a result of mismanagement and other issues, the developers failed to find success and left a tone of distrust across the community in their wake. **Through Elazar's work with HATCH Workshop and involvement with the Stockton Arts Foundation and Stockton Art League, they are working to develop a local land trust and restore the Stockton Arts Endowment, so as to strengthen Stockton's arts ecosystem and develop sustainable bases of power and wealth generation practices that benefit Stockton's diverse residents.** COVID-19 was a catalyst behind these efforts, as Elazar shifted Hatch's operations to co-facilitate the Print to Protect Coalition, which distributed 10,000 face shields to the local community and developed a unified grant application seeking funds for the entire arts community. Simultaneously, Elazar led a program that distributed over 500 individual desks to local school children for distance learning, as well as hundreds of pieces of office equipment to local nonprofits. In March of 2021, Elazar co-developed a grant program that successfully distributed \$100,000 into the local creative community in the form of \$1,000 individual grants through a lottery system that emphasized low barriers, transparency, and simplicity. The success of this program led to HATCH workshop adopting a structural re-granting and resource distribution model.

APT Action Group is organizing with artists nationally to challenge exploitative practices in the arts.

The APT Action Group is a collective of artists, cultural workers, and educators spearheaded by artists York Chang, Elana Mann, Ken Ehrlich, Carolyn Castaño, Lordy Rodriguez, and Shirley Tse, who were each impacted by the actions of the Artist Pension Trust. Artists, as independent workers, often contend with financial insecurity due to their challenging gig conditions of low wages, unpredictable income, high debt, few assets, and lack of a social safety net. The Artist Pension Trust (APT) emerged in 2004 as a promising solution for artists' financial sustainability. APT was pitched to artists as an innovative way to create financial security for artists by pooling their artworks together, introducing them to a broader international art market, and allowing the artists to collectively share in the proceeds. APTs were established regionally and internationally, including in Los Angeles, New York, Mexico City, London, Berlin, and Mumbai. Each participating artist “invested” dozens of artworks with APT, which was contractually obligated to store and insure work locally, and to sell the works internationally. Eventually, APT gathered more than 13,000 artworks from 2,000 artists in 75 countries, with an insured value of at least \$70 million as of 2013. In 2019, participating artists across the world began reporting that APT had stopped responding to phone calls, requests for institutional loans, and inquiries for sales. In May 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, the APT Action Group came together to develop a broad, multi-faceted media and public education strategy and recruited legal representation to recover their stolen works. Artists in Los Angeles investigated and were shocked to discover that all of their invested artworks had inexplicably vanished without notice from APT’s Los Angeles storage facility. The APT Action Group was able to locate their artwork in a facility in upstate New York. Threatening legal action against APT, they compelled APT to begin responding about the condition of their artworks, and are now in the process of negotiating the return of the works. **What began in May 2021 as an online discussion with over one hundred artists, has transformed into three separate legal battles as well as a national discussion over inequality and unfair practices in the arts.** Through the APT Action Group’s organizing efforts, they are collectively challenging exploitative practices in the arts.

APT ACTION GROUP

Team, Los Angeles County

Team Members: York Chang, Carolyn Castaño, Elana Mann, Ken Ehrlich, Lordy Rodriguez, Shirley Tse



Pictured from left to right: York Chang, Elana Mann, Shirley Tse, Marina Kappos.
Los Angeles River, Los Angeles, CA.
August 2022. Photo by Sandra de la Loza.

[Website](#)

VIRGINIA BLANCO

Individual, San Francisco County



Pictured from left to right: Adela Fornes, Sam Prince, Ben Ortega, L. Duarte, Elena Estér, Francisco Rodriguez, Tony Ortega, Pauls S. Flores, Virginia Blanco, Roberto Varea. Brava Theater, San Francisco, CA. November 2019. Photo by Adelyna Tirado.

[Website](#)

Virginia Blanco is normalizing language diversity in the Bay Area theater industry.

Virginia Blanco is a practicing artist, actor, and artistic director from Argentina based in San Francisco. Since 2016, she has worked professionally as an actor in the Bay Area with companies such as Cutting Ball Theater, Oakland Theater Project, and TheatreFirst. Although Virginia has been able to access many opportunities in the Bay Area theater community, as an immigrant Latina woman with an accent she was surprised to observe frequent barriers and microaggressions in audition rooms, classrooms, and rehearsal rooms. Despite a strong Latinx presence in the Bay area, Latinx artists are underrepresented in the theater world, on and off the stage. Virginia also noticed that mainstream companies' idea of increasing representation is often to sprinkle Spanish phrases over-familiar works or to feature plays that depict a stereotypical or exoticized view of the Latinx experience. To counter these trends, Virginia created La Lengua Teatro en Español in 2019, with a mission to present contemporary and original theater in Spanish (with English supertitles). Since becoming an artist in residence at Brava Theater, Virginia has continued the work of La Lengua, producing half a dozen projects throughout the pandemic that employed scores of Spanish-speaking Latinx actors and designers. **With this work, Virginia Blanco is changing the landscape for Spanish-speaking theater artists in the Bay Area (especially immigrants and Latinas) by providing them with opportunities to work together professionally and to share their stories in their own voices, while also actively promoting language diversity and giving equal status on stage to Spanish, English, and Native languages of the Americas.** In the fall of 2021, in collaboration with AlterTheater, Virginia recruited a cohort of six BIPOC playwrights to write short plays exploring the history and legacy of colonization in the Americas using Spanish, Spanglish, Diné, and English. Four of these playwrights will see their produced and performed in front of a live audience in the fall of 2022.

Sarah Rafael Garcia is changing the arts landscape in Orange County through BIPOC-centered and serving arts spaces.

Despite Orange County being home to over three million residents, of which more than half identify as people of color and a third as Latinx, most local arts organizations and businesses are white-led and white-serving, often relying on outside talent. Sarah Rafael Garcia, a first-generation immigrant and college graduate with over 14 years of experience as an arts leader in the OC, recognized the deep dissonance that exists in a region that is so culturally diverse but often ignores its BIPOC arts professionals and audiences. In August 2021, in Santa Ana, CA, Sarah established **Crear Studio**, an art+comunidad+gallery space that centers BIPOC artists and experiences, as a hyper-local approach to building cultural relevance and equity. The gallery has expanded to include **BIPOC Arts Spaces** – a Digital Archives Program that makes exhibitions and community-based historical archives accessible all year round through a mentorship and preservation program. Through Crear Studio and BIPOC Arts Spaces, Sarah is offering artists of color a platform to work with archivists and present their work to a broader audience and gain the experience, connections, and visibility to advance in their careers. Garcia explained to the **Daily Pilot**, “We are local artists who want an opportunity to do art...what brought us together is art, what keeps us together is community and now we are a gallery.”

SARAH RAFAEL GARCIA

Individual, Orange County



Sarah Rafael Garcia, founder of Crear Studio.

Santa Ana, CA. August 2021.

Photo by Scott Smeltzer (LA Times Photographer)

Linktree

ELIZABETH GRANDSAERT

Individual, Amador County



Elizabeth Grandsaert. Pioneer, CA. "Self -Portrait in Studio".
October 2021.

[Website](#)

Elizabeth Grandsaert is shifting the region's cultural and political landscape to become more inclusive and diverse.

Elizabeth Grandsaert is an artist, assistant, administrator, maker, designer, and teacher based in Amador County, which sits on the unceded ancestral lands of the Nissan, Washoe, Plains Miwok, and Northern Sierra Miwok indigenous people. This region is known as the "Mother Lode," a stretch of mountains heavily developed and mined in the 1850s during the California gold rush. Today, Amador County's population is 77% White. Efforts to diversify are complicated by high housing and property costs, an aging population (27% of the population is 65+), and few industry opportunities. **In response to the area's current demographics, Elizabeth founded the Pony Farm Residency to bring new perspectives to Amador through visiting artists.** The residency prioritizes low-income, emerging BIPOC/LGBTQ artists whose work champions underrepresented cultures, and creates space for residents to share their stories with the local community. Elizabeth works closely with their fiscal sponsor, the Amador Arts Council, and shares their commitment to advancing racial equity and anti-racism. In a meeting on May 24, 2022, the Amador County Board of District Supervisors (composed of 5 White men over the age of 50) threatened to remove funding from the Amador Arts Council based on their sponsorship of Pony Farm. Members of the Board referred to some of the artwork created by artists-in-residence and by Elizabeth, which explored themes of identity, queerness, and anti-colonialism, as "filthy," per an account in the Ledger Dispatch's commentary section. In response, Elizabeth started a social media campaign to document and highlight the hostile statements made by the Board. The campaign gained significant attention locally and online and ultimately served as an impromptu and successful network-building effort. With support from the Arts Council and a growing network of local BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, Elizabeth is working to advance conversations about inclusion and diversity, and shifting the current cultural and political landscape in Amador County so as to hold governing parties accountable for their discriminatory and non-inclusive policies.

Erika Hirugami is challenging the bureaucracy of undocumented creative labor in the arts industry.

During the first wave of pandemic-related financial relief funding, the undocumented community was excluded from stimulus payments issued by the federal government. As different arts organizations began developing grant programs to provide financial assistance, **Hirugami**—a formerly undocumented, first-generation transnational Mexican immigrant, curator, arts advocate, critic, writer, and scholar—questioned what resources were available to *undocreatives* (undocumented arts creatives) – the answer was none. To bring this issue into sharper focus, Hirugami gathered *testimonios* from artists and arts professionals in the undoc+ spectrum and wrote her latest graduate thesis, titled **Political Art Action: The Aesthetics of Undocumentedness**. In August 2021, she was awarded an Arts for LA fellowship to conduct policy-driven research that could aid in rethinking how arts organizations can work with members of the undocumented community at a county level. Her findings will be published in the winter of 2023 through a policy report that will be the first of its kind to speak of Undocumentedness in the creative sector. Hirugami recently launched the first-ever open call and residency made exclusively for artists in the undoc+ spectrum, while she continues to explore and analyze this topic through public talks, articles, and her network of academics, lawmakers, arts and culture leaders, alongside her community of individuals in the undoc+ spectrum.

ERIKA HIRUGAMI

Individual, Los Angeles County



Erika Hirugami, MA. MAAB. Artwork by Francisco Donoso.
Photo by Phoenix Neri.

Website

BORA "MAX" KOKNAR

Individual, San Francisco County



Bora "Max" Koknar at Live at the Dragon. Redwood City, CA. January 2020. Photo by Ricardo Archila.

[Website](#)

Bora Koknar put people over profits--and set a precedent for other South Bay theatre companies to follow.

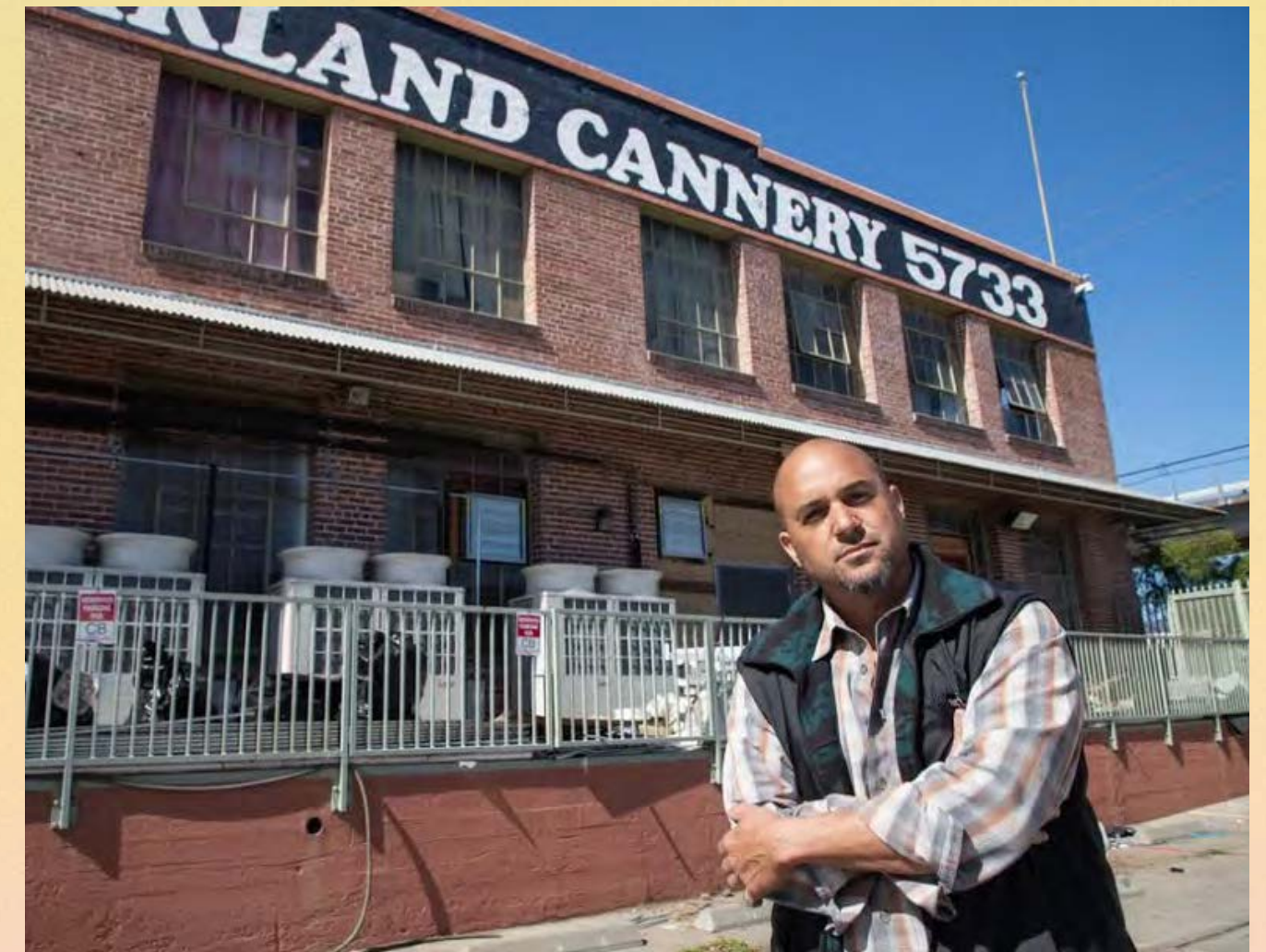
When the opportunity to serve as Co-Artistic Director of Dragon Productions Theatre Company—a 20-year-old black-box nonprofit theatre—materialized, Bora Koknar, an immigrant artist who had long experienced the industry’s broken economic model and entrenched white supremacy, jumped at the chance to design a more inclusive, equitable, and decolonized space. On January 1, 2020, Koknar began rolling out the Dragon – a diverse and vibrant community hub hosting multidisciplinary performing arts events and a safe, creative space where artists who felt marginalized elsewhere could have institutional support and a platform to authentically develop their voice and careers. When the pandemic set in, Koknar led the Dragon staff in putting the Dragon's mission into practice, prioritizing paid opportunities for underrepresented artists over operational costs—a decision that the company’s Board of Directors refused to support. Koknar offered to resign, which would free up allocated funds. Instead, the Board opted to step down, allowing for a new set of directors, who were willing to accept a more equitable and accessible vision for the Dragon, to take shape. In a July 2020 article from the **Palo Alto Weekly**, Koknar described his actions, stating "If Dragon isn't going to be able to make paying historically vulnerable and underrepresented people a priority, then we shouldn't survive [the pandemic]...the point of a nonprofit organization is not to perpetuate itself, it is to serve, and now is our chance to serve."

Alistair Monroe is fighting for artists and cultural producers to have safe live-work spaces.

Alistair Monroe is a cultural arts producer and festival promoter who has dedicated his life to protecting and preserving the Oakland Cannery's live-work artist studios. Alistair is leading a group of 30+ artists—ranging from military veterans, activists, educators, and professionals—in partnership with Oakland environmentalists who are using Proposition 65, the state's landmark toxics enforcement law, to get the Cannery's unpermitted diesel generators shut down since the city's efforts continue to fail. Like so many communities in the Bay Area, Oakland's affordability crisis continues to displace artists and gig workers, or drive them into unsafe properties—the most tragic instance being the Ghost Ship warehouse, where a 2016 fire killed thirty-six people. Oakland's warehouses are primarily clustered along ten miles of Interstate 880 from West Oakland through downtown and East Oakland. The Oakland Cannery Building is located along this corridor, at 5707–5733 San Leandro Street, where it has been home to a thriving artist community for over 40 years and is one of the Bay Area's oldest legal artist live-work buildings. In 2016, this deindustrialized corridor was designated as a “Green Zone,” a city regulation that permits an area for industrial cannabis cultivation, processing, and sales. Soon after, the Oakland Cannery Building was acquired by Green Safe, a Denver-based cannabis real estate investment firm. Green Safe has effectively ignored deteriorating living conditions since acquiring the Cannery, which has reduced the number of tenants in its 20 residential units from 32 to 10 over the last two years. Initially, Monroe and other tenants were met with success when the City of Oakland passed an ordinance barring residential evictions from Green Zones and warned Green Sage and its cannabis tenants against expanding operations into vacated live/work spaces. However, Monroe's fight to shut down the Cannery's generators has dragged on since 2020, when Green Sage began running at least seven diesel generators in direct violation of the state's fire code and city ordinances. The generators' daily and incessant activity has created a health hazard for residents who are being exposed to diesel fumes, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and other pollutants. Alistair and others have worked tirelessly to force the City's hand in abating the generators' use and have since moved forward with filing suit against Green Sage for its alleged violation of the federal Clean Air Act and California's Proposition 65 toxics law.

ALISTAIR MONROE

Individual, Alameda County



Alistair Monroe at the Oakland Cannery, Oakland, CA. March 17, 2022.
Photo by Amaya Edwards (KQED Photographer)

[Website](#)

DANIAL NORD

Individual, Los Angeles County



Danial Nord. San Pedro, CA. 2022. Photo by Danial Nord.

[Website](#)

Danial Nord is helping underrepresented creative voices fight gentrification-driven displacement.

After a public hearing on January 16, 2020, artist and San Pedro, CA resident of 19 years, Danial Nord, embarked on a mission to support and empower the San Pedro arts community against the unlawful redevelopment in the Pacific Corridor. Recognizing the City of LA's long history of racist and classist land-use policies, Nord was determined to protect the historic San Pedro Pacific Corridor – a diverse, low-income, 82% non-white neighborhood that is the nexus of more than sixty small galleries, artists' studios, art centers, and arts-related businesses. Nord rallied his community and launched a multi-pronged campaign that challenged lawmakers to reverse project approvals that catalyzed gentrification and displacement, in addition to conceiving and implementing an advocacy campaign that stopped State Assembly Bill 832, which was originally intended to nullify 18 Community Redevelopment Plans in the region (including San Pedro's Pacific Corridor). If passed, the bill would have voided community protections and affordable housing requirements, and exempted developers from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). [AB-832](#) has since been rewritten (the updated version protects tenants in the aftermath of COVID-19), approved, and enacted by the Governor.

meghan o'keefe is pushing back against the dominant normative culture and the silencing of queer voices in Amador County.

meghan o'keefe, a queer, non-binary artist and outside-the-box thinker and doer, is pushing against Amador County's heteronormative culture in their role as Executive Director of the **Amador Arts Council (AAC)**. The AAC's mission is to serve historically disinvested people by advancing rural freedom of expression, a task that o'keefe takes to heart since their identity has made them the target of homophobic and prejudiced micro and macro-agressions throughout their entire career. Since joining AAC, o'keefe has advocated for the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access by developing anti-racist policies and centering LGBTQIA+ voices in public events, such as the 2021 in-person exhibition titled Safe Space Rural LGBTQAI+ which sought to increase the visibility of local LGBTQAI+ artists and provide a beacon of light for rural kids who feel like they don't fit into the region's dominant culture. However, the exhibit faced extreme backlash from the local government and community members with o'keefe nevertheless risking their safety, reputation, and professional career to advocate for the LGBTQAI+ community. Despite their experience of setbacks, threats, and overt hostility, o'keefe has "re-emerged with more power and an unwavering commitment to be [their] 'big ol' gay self' to a whole new level of authenticity."

meghan "mojo" o'keefe

Individual, Amador County



meghan "mojo" o'keefe. Pine Grove, CA. October 2020.
Photo by Zams Photography.

RUBEN OCHOA

Individual, Los Angeles County



Ruben Ochoa. MacArthur Park, Los Angeles, CA.

#SupportStreetVendors, from ¡Vendedores, Presente! 2021.

Photo by Ruben Ochoa and Pete Galindo

[Website](#)

Ruben Ochoa is advocating for the livelihood of LA's street vendor community through art and technology.

Ruben Ochoa is a Los Angeles-based artist whose practice addresses racial injustice, systemic oppression, and social inequity. Ruben Ochoa was invited to participate in LACMA x Snapchat: Monumental Perspectives, an initiative that asks artists to use augmented reality to interpret their own idea of monuments, and then creates art using these new technologies. **Influenced by his family's history in tortilla vending, and his advocacy for invisible labor, Ruben focused on the street vendor community and championed their rights to operate as small businesses without harassment, citations, and violence, which were exacerbated by COVID-19.** The project started out as an augmented reality lens featuring a magical realist environment of monumentally scaled Frutero, Paletero, and Elotero carts. The AR lens, ¡Vendedores, Presente!, quickly grew into a monumental community-based campaign that provides a hub of conversation between the viewer, street vendors, advocates, and policymakers. Ochoa partnered with Inclusive Action for the City and Community Power Collective to amplify the campaign via street posters posted throughout the city; a website that provides street vendors with tools to help navigate the city's bureaucratic permitting process; a docuseries that features the stories of three street vendors; and limited edition prints for fundraising that directly supports street vendors most in need. Most recently, funds raised supported LA vendors to travel to Sacramento and amplified their collective voices to speak on the critical role street vendors play in California. Funds raised from Ruben Ochoa's prints helped vendors be present as Senate Bill 972, a law designed to ease the health permit process for street food vendors, was passed.

Open Door Studio is shifting governance and ownership to artists with disabilities.

Open Door Studio is operated by a team of eight who are shifting power to artists with disabilities and serving as a model for the proliferation of other public art spaces in **Oxnard, California**. At the start of the pandemic, there were no galleries or public art spaces for local artists in Oxnard, nor was there support for artists with disabilities. With the arrival of shelter-in-place mandates, the region's few services for individuals with disabilities became even more limited. In response, team member RoxAnne D. Trujillo launched a virtual art class that brought together members of the disability community and offered a virtual space where they could cope with the effects of COVID-19. As the class gained traction, its participants (i.e., the team) began to envision a physical space where all local artists could create, showcase, and sell their work. On March 1, 2021, the team launched Open Door Studio, Oxnard's only public art gallery that also happens to be operated by artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In addition to putting equity and decision-making authority into the hands of artists with disabilities, the Open Door Studio's team is providing local emerging artists with a platform to show and sell their work.

OPEN DOOR STUDIO

Team, Ventura County

Team Members: RoxAnne D. Trujillo, Tess Zufolo, Daniel Schneider, David Idell, Caraline Murphy, Mark Gonzalez, Dylan Czoschke, Taku Johnson



[Website](#)

KHALIL ANTHONY PEEBLES

Team, Alameda County

Team Members: Khali Anthony Peebles and Darice M. Jones



Khalil Anthony, Under the Radar Festival. Public Theater. NY, NYC. 2012.

[Website](#)

Peebles & Team are creating equitable opportunities for Black creatives in the global media industry.

Khali Anthony Peebles and Darice M. Jones are reckoning with the systemic exclusion of Black creatives from the media industry through the **Bijou Film Festival**, an immersive, global, five-day House Music film experience that offers a platform to Black creatives for premiering new work, finding representation, and accessing a global network. Screenings and related events are held in Oakland, CA, in addition to live streaming on KweliTV, a Black-owned media platform. Through the Festival, Peebles and Jones are creating pathways for Black creators to have sector access and representation. The team also celebrates what they have coined as Black Fantastic Otherness – the otherworldly creative power of Black origins and its influence on music, arts, science, and culture throughout the Triangular Trade Diaspora. The Festival's success has prompted Anthony and Jones to work towards becoming a cultural funding agency, assisting not only in the showcasing of these brilliant works of art but also supporting the creators financially beyond Bijou's two monetary prizes.

Nicholas Phan is challenging anti-Asian racism in classical music.

In the wake of the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, the classical music and opera world leaped into a large-scale examination of the racism baked into its institutions. However, the industry's reckoning was largely framed in a binary of black-and-white dynamics. Prompted by this incomplete understanding of DEI, in July 2020, Nicholas Phan, a prominent gay singer of color, published the essay **Just Another Dumb Asian Singer** – a phrase he has heard used against him and his colleagues – highlighting the ways anti-Asian racism plays out in the opera and classical music communities, and outlining the barriers it places in the career paths of singers and instrumental musicians of Asian descent. Phan's essay reverberated in the community and helped spark industry-wide conversations across opera companies and operatic service organizations, as well as an extensive article published in the New York Times. In tandem with this work, Phan also is an active founding member of the Asian Opera Alliance (AOA), which operates as a watchdog in the industry, publicizing incidents of anti-Asian racism in Opera and holding those in leadership positions accountable.

NICHOLAS PHAN

Individual, San Francisco County



Nicholas Phan. San Francisco, CA. October 12, 2021.

Photo by Clubsoda Productions

[Website](#)

KENNETH "KENNY" RAMOS

Individual, San Diego County



Kenny Ramos. Phoenix, AZ. April 2019. Production Photo from Cornerstone Theater Company's production of Native Nation, written by Larissa FastHorse;

[Website](#)

Kenny Ramos is decolonizing the San Diego theater industry and increasing Native representation and community engagement.

Kenny Ramos is a Kumeyaay culture bearer and theater artist from the Barona Band of Mission Indians. They grew up on the Barona Indian Reservation and earned a BA in American Indian Studies from UCLA. Throughout their theater career, they have felt invisible as a Kumeyaay theater artist, especially in their own ancestral homelands, the unceded Kumeyaay territory, colonially known as San Diego County. San Diego County encompasses 18 federal Indian Reservations, the highest concentration of reservations in the entire United States, yet Native communities remain unrepresented in the large and vibrant San Diego theater community, which includes two of the nation's leading League of Resident Theatre (LORT) nonprofit theaters: La Jolla Playhouse and The Old Globe. In 2020, after the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the theater industry and the murder of George Floyd sparked the national reckoning of racial inequity, Kenny noticed San Diego theaters started to highlight their Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion efforts to engage BIPOC communities. This presented an opportunity for Kenny to start building and developing reciprocal, respectful, and ongoing relationships between their tribal Kumeyaay Nation and the local theater community. Since then, **Kenny has been actively working with La Jolla Playhouse (LJP), The Old Globe, and Diversionary Theatre, which has led to an increase in Native representation and community engagement in the San Diego theater community.** As an Artist-in-Residence at LJP, Kenny has been able to Indigenize the theater from within by providing guidance on any and all tribal-related endeavors and by connecting Native theater artists to LJP. Through Kenny's work at LJP and other theaters, a local LORT theater has incorporated Kumeyaay culture in their programming, and Kumeyaay visibility, as well as paid opportunities for local Kumeyaay artists, has increased in the San Diego theater community.

Kevin Seaman is modeling community and artist-led grantmaking practices for arts and culture funders.

After rallying communities to push back on the City of San Francisco's decisions to award the majority of its emergency funding to large-budget, white-led institutions, Kevin Seaman, a queer, nonbinary artist, and arts administrator based in San Francisco, CA, began their own efforts to support artists who were falling through the cracks. Beginning in June 2020, Kevin convened community partners (including artists, funders, arts workers, and consultants) to address unmet artist and arts worker needs, and worked with funding partners to raise over \$220,000 to support the **Artists' Adaptability Circles (AAC)** program, a seed funding a leadership development program rooted in mutual aid. The AAC's goals are to equitably support BIPOC, queer and other historically under-resourced artists to get back to work, and to build upon trusted community relationships to creatively address systemic issues arising in artists' lives and communities. Under Kevin's guidance, the program is now expanding out of triage mode and toward sustainability, attracting the attention of national funders who have made a three-year \$335,000 investment in this innovative model centering mutual aid and artist autonomy.

KEVIN "VIN" SEAMAN

Individual, San Francisco County



Kevin Seaman. San Francisco, CA. "Untitled Self-Portrait"
2021. Photo by Kevin Seaman.

Website

RASHEED SHABAZZ

Individual, Alameda County



Rasheed Shabazz. Betti Ono Gallery, Oakland, CA.
Photo by Uthman Williams.

Rasheed Shabazz is challenging hegemonic, exclusionary public narratives in the City of Alameda.

Contending with racist and violent histories requires action. In Alameda, CA, Rasheed Shabazz, a Black journalist, educator, and organizer whose work centers place and belonging, recognized that he needed to call out the upholding of white supremacy in his own backyard. In 2018, Shabazz started a petition to rename Alameda's first park – Andrew Jackson Park, named after the 7th US president known to be an enslaver and ethnic cleanser. He hoped his campaign would initiate a conversation about racism in public spaces and emphasize the need for comprehensive and transparent education, especially about local history. No action was taken by government entities until it was impossible to ignore the problem – after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Shabazz remobilized efforts and **Rename Jackson Park** was formed, and ultimately compelled the City of Alameda to rename the park **Chochenyo**, honoring the language of the local Ohlone people. These efforts inspired the renaming of other Alameda parks and streets that honored white supremacists, and the City has allocated funds to the Sogorea' Te Community Land Trust (Shuumi Tax) to develop a land acknowledgment and incorporate history into school curricula. Shabazz' actions have inspired others to continue dismantling racist narratives across Alameda, and he remains committed to creating spaces and opportunities to expand the circle of stories, histories, and cultures discussed and represented in his city.

Piper Thomasson is pushing for racial equity in culture via dance at local and field-wide levels.

Piper Thomasson is a Black and Japanese, queer, female dancer based in Oakland, CA. In December 2020, Thomasson published an **open letter** to shed light on the pervasiveness of white supremacy culture in the dance field, and particularly, how it manifested at Shawl-Anderson Dance Center (SADC) in Berkeley, CA – a modern dance mecca for East Bay dancers. Leading up to the open letter, Thomasson—who had worked at SADC for three and a half years—served a dual role as Administrative Manager and Equity Practice Advisor, a temporary position co-designed between her and leadership. The position was created after leadership acknowledged the effort that Thomasson was putting into educating them about racial equity (as the only Black admin staff member) without being compensated. In November 2020, SADC announced budget cuts coupled with promises about the continuation of their DEI efforts. Employees were offered further reduced hours or a layoff with severance in exchange for signing an NDA. However, Thomasson’s role as Equity Practice Advisor was not renewed and there was a general sense among staff that any promises of progress were left unfulfilled. Accepting the layoff (sans severance) and, alone, penning her open letter, which was circulated throughout social media and within the Bay Area Dancers’ community, Thomasson willingly put her career, art practice, and personal life at risk to call out the conscious and unconscious exploitative practices of an organization that was close to her heart and that has an important commitment to its dance community.

PIPER THOMASSON

Individual, Alameda County



Piper Thomasson. Oakland, CA. "Piper with Notebook." June 2022.

Photo by Jer Blanco (@jer.vision)

Website

VOCES DEL TEATRO ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE

Team, Los Angeles County

Team Members: Liane Schirmer, Minerva Garcia, and Blanca Melchor



Pictured from left to right: Minerva Garcia, Liane Schirmer.

[Website](#)

Voces del Teatro is fighting cultural erasure and ensuring Latinx inclusion in Los Angeles' theatre canon and cultural landscape.

At the outset of the COVID-19 lockdown, Latinx theatres in Los Angeles, which have historically been underfunded and understaffed, were some of the first to close their doors, many of them permanently. The stark reality that an entire body of work and the stories passed down from Latinx elders could be lost sparked a group of theatre artists and practitioners into action. Minerva Garcia, Blanca Melchor, and Liane Schirmer came together in 2020 to establish the **Voces del Teatro Oral History Archive** – an initiative born out of the Latinx Theatre Alliance/Los Angeles focused on compiling a ground-breaking oral history project, titled Voces del Teatro – An Oral History of Latinx Theatre in Modern Los Angeles – Late 1960s – Present. The team has worked since then to document and preserve the history and artistic and social contributions of Latinx theatres and theatre-makers. So far, Voces has completed 40-hour-long interviews and organized two community events to highlight the interviews. In addition, the archive is being utilized in Loyola-Marymount University's theatre curriculum and became a member of the research alliance **LA as Subject**. Additionally, the archive was shared with a group of LA archivists and historians at the 17th Annual Los Angeles Archives Bazaar which took place this past October at the USC Doheny Library. Through Voces del Teatro, the Latinx theatre community's oral history is being cemented within the cultural landscape of the city.

Alisa Yang is advocating for safe conditions for BIPOC, queer, disabled staff, and artists at the Djerassi Resident Artists Program.

Safe spaces for artists of color and those with disabilities are limited in the nonprofit and mainstream art worlds, often lacking the tools these artists need to succeed. Alisa Yang, a queer, chronically-ill, first-generation Taiwanese-American antidisiplinary artist, and independent filmmaker is keenly aware of this reality and has taken risks to reverse these circumstances at the **Djerassi Resident Artists Program**, an influential and internationally recognized arts residency in Northern California. After accepting a job and residency at Djerassi, Yang experienced racial and disability discrimination by the Board and leadership, unearthing a history of racist and inequitable policies and practices. In response, Yang led efforts demanding (and ultimately resulting in) the replacement of the Executive Director, ongoing DEAI and anti-oppression training, clear complaint/grievance reporting protocol, organizational examination and restructuring, and other necessary follow-up actions. Results were not immediate; Yang worked with Djerassi on a restorative justice model for eight months to ensure she would “leave Djerassi a better place than [she] found it, a safe place for BIPOC, queer, disabled staff and artists.” Yang is setting an influential precedent for other residency programs to center the needs and safety of the most vulnerable groups they serve, and redesign their programs to be truly inclusive and equitable.

ALISA YANG

Individual, Santa Clara County



[Website](#)

