



Press Release

**FOR RELEASE:**

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

**The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts  
announces**

## **The 2018 Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellows**

Five change-makers begin year-long fellowship at the  
Kennedy Center Arts Summit, Monday, April 16, 2018

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts announces the 2018–2019 cohort of Citizen Artist Fellows, a curated class of artists from across the country who use their artistic practice to create positive social impact. Through a year-long engagement with the Kennedy Center, Citizen Artists receive a national platform through which to advance their work; performance and career development opportunities; and mentorship from Kennedy Center leadership.

Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellows are chosen through a competitive nomination process, and represent the artistic and cultural diversity of America. The 2018–2019 Fellows are:

- **Justus Harris** (Chicago, Illinois), an artist and founder of MedSculp, which designs art-based, 3-D visualization tools for people with diabetes and chronic conditions.
- **Shaw Pong Liu** (Boston, Massachusetts), a violinist, composer, and social activist whose work addresses community-police relations, gun violence, and race relations.
- **Omar Offendum** (Los Angeles, California), a Syrian American rapper, poet, and international peace advocate.
- **Donney Rose** (Baton Rouge, Louisiana), a poet, educator, and community activist.

~ *more* ~

- **Rulan Tangen** (Santa Fe, New Mexico), a choreographer, dancer, actress, and cultural advocate for indigenous community.

The 2018–2019 Citizen Artists Fellows begin their tenure on Monday, April 16 at the Arts Summit, the Kennedy Center’s annual convening that brings together artists, change-makers, and thought leaders from across disciplines to discuss how society might use the arts to address critical issues. The Arts Summit is a valuable touchpoint for the Fellows, as the conversations, ideas, and relationships built during the event will shape their current and future work.

The Citizen Artist Fellow program was launched in 2016 as part of the Center’s celebration of President John F. Kennedy’s legacy and his ideals of courage, freedom, justice, service, and gratitude—enduring principles that guide Citizen Artists’ work. The program recognizes emerging artists across the country who utilize their art form to positively impact communities. Fellows have access to a host of Kennedy Center artists and staff experts to support their ambitions. Additionally, they receive a platform for their work, including opportunities for performances and exhibitions at the Kennedy Center and beyond, and invitations to present and participate in national convenings.

“The arts are a powerful tool for change, and as the nation’s cultural center, the Kennedy Center has a vital role to play in recognizing, uplifting, and advancing individual artists through this Citizen Artist initiative,” said Mario Rossero, Senior Vice President of Education. “Our Citizen Artist Fellows are addressing some of the most pressing issues of our day, and the Kennedy Center is honored to partner with these exceptional artists, who honor President Kennedy’s legacy through their transformative work.”

### **The 2018 Citizen Artist Fellows**

**Justus Harris (Chicago, Illinois)** is a patient, artist, and educator based in Chicago. Diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age 14, he has since combined his artistic training and patient experiences to found MedSculp, which designs art-based, 3D visual educational tools for people with diabetes and chronic conditions. MedSculp translates personal medical data and concepts from charts and graphs into 3D-printed objects and 2D designs that can be intuitively understood by and effectively used by people of

all ages and abilities. Harris's work embodies the Maker and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) education principals with the experience of living with chronic illness. He was the first Maker in Residence at the Chicago Public Library Maker Lab and has exhibited his work at institutions including the Stanford School of Medicine, the European Commission, and the American Diabetes Association.

Violinist, composer, and erhu player **Shaw Pong Liu (Boston, Massachusetts)** engages diverse communities through multidisciplinary collaborations, creative music, and social dialogue. As 2016 City of Boston Artist-in-Residence, she started *Code Listen*, an ongoing project using music creation and performance to build relationships between Boston police, teen artists, family members surviving homicide, and local musicians, supporting healing and dialogue around gun violence, racism, and police practices. Other projects include leading Sing Home, a song-sharing project that builds on Liu's bicultural and bilingual Chinese American roots to document songs from home as sung by individual residents, workers, students, and visitors to Boston's Chinatown; composing music for Conference of the Birds, a dance theater project inspired by the 12th-century Persian literary masterpiece of the same name exploring migration, refugee experiences, and the search for the divine, in collaboration with an international ensemble of dancers, musicians, and artists directed by choreographer Wendy Jehlen.

**Omar Offendum (Los Angeles, California)** is a Syrian American rapper/poet living in Los Angeles. Known for his unique blend of Hip Hop and Arabic poetry, he has been featured on prominent international news outlets, lectured at a number of prestigious academic institutions, collaborated with major museums and cultural organizations on several high-profile projects, and helped raise millions of dollars for various humanitarian relief groups. A graduate of the University of Virginia's School of Architecture, he has been able to carve a distinct path for himself as a thoughtful entertainer and activist, able to speak to a multitude of relevant issues and diverse global audiences over the course of his decade-long career.

**Donney Rose (Baton Rouge, Louisiana)** is a poet, teaching artist, and community activist from Baton Rouge. He works as a teaching artist and marketing director for an arts-based non-profit Forward Arts Inc. His work as a performance poet/writer has been featured on *Atlanta Black Star*, *Blavity*, *Button Poetry*, *All Def Digital*, *Slam Find*, *225 Magazine*, and in the online journal *Drunk In A Midnight Choir* and Nicholls State's *Gris Gris* literary journal. His work as a community activist has been highlighted on *BBC*, *Huffington Post*, *The New York Times Democracy Now*, and *The Advocate*. He received the Humanitarian of the Year award at 2016 New V Awards for promoting activism through his art and is a member of Baton Rouge Business Report's 2017 Forty Under 40 class.

**Rulan Tangen (Santa Fe, New Mexico)** is Artistic Director/Choreographer of DANCING EARTH, nurturing new generations of Indigenous contemporary dance artist-leaders. She regenerates movement as an expression of indigenous worldview, functional ritual for transformation and healing, kinetic decolonization, and animistic connection with all life forms of earth. Her work spans dance, film, opera, social-environmental justice advocacy, writing, and education. She has served as a Visiting Distinguished Scholar at Washington University and Stanford University's Institute of Diversity in Arts, and other Guest Artist/Lecturer appointments. Honors include: top 10

finalist for the Nathan Cummings Award for Social Change, Arts and Healing Network's Arts for Social Change Award, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation Dance Fellowship for Artistic Innovation, A Blade of Grass Fellowship for Socially engaged art, and UC Riverside's Costo Medal for Education, Research and Community Service.

## **FUNDING CREDITS**

*Major support for Arts Summit is provided by the Annenberg Foundation.*

**For more information about the Kennedy Center Arts Summit and the Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellow Recognition, please visit <http://www.kennedy-center.org/pages/specialevents/summit>.**

**Discover the Kennedy Center on social media**



#KennedyCenter  
#citizenartist  
#artssummit

# # #

## **PRESS CONTACTS**

Michelle Pendoley  
(202) 416-8448  
[MAPendoley@kennedy-center.org](mailto:MAPendoley@kennedy-center.org)

Brittany Laeger  
(202) 416-8445  
[BALaeger@kennedy-center.org](mailto:BALaeger@kennedy-center.org)