

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

**The 2019-2020 Kennedy Center
Citizen Artist Fellows**

**Eight change-makers from across the nation begin year-long fellowship at
the Kennedy Center Arts Summit, Monday, April 29, 2019**

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts announces the 2019–2020 cohort of Citizen Artist Fellows, a curated group of artists who use their artistic practice to create positive social impact. Now in its fourth year, the Citizen Artists Fellow program recognizes a 2019-2020 class of eight change-makers representing every region of the country. Through a year-long engagement with the Center, Citizen Artist Fellows receive a national platform 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, geographic, and cultural diversity of America. The 2019–2020 Fellows:

- **David “Olmecca” Barragon** (Los Angeles, California), a hip hop artist, producer, and activist whose bilingual music reflects his history working on human rights issues.
- **Sky Cubacub** (Chicago, Illinois), artist, designer, and leader of Rebirth Garments, a clothing line created for people on the full spectrum of gender, size, and ability.
- **Mark Gonzales** (Los Angeles, California), a poet, writer, and futurist reshaping ideas of what is socially possible through strategic storytelling.
- **Alysia Lee** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), singer, arts education advocate, and founder and artistic director of Sister Cities Girlchoir, working to empower girls through comprehensive choral training.

- **Emily Marks** (Memphis, Tennessee), artist, advocate, and founder and director of Lionheart Live Arts & Youth Theatre, dedicated to reinvigorating performance for youth and communities.
- **Yvonne Montoya** (Tucson, Arizona), dancer, choreographer, and founding director of Safos Dance Theatre whose work is inspired by the language, cultures, and aesthetics of the Southwest.
- **Christina Soriano** (Winston-Salem, North Carolina), a dancer and professor researching how improvisational dance can improve brain and body health in older adults.
- **Mi'Jan Celie Tho-Biaz, Ed.D** (Santa Fe, New Mexico), an oral historian and documentarian using the power of narrative as a transformative tool for social change.

“We looked for exceptional artists from across the nation who embody President Kennedy’s legacy and ideals,” said Mario Rossero, Senior Vice President of Education. “They work in multiple art forms and come from communities both large and small, but our Citizen Artists all use the arts as a powerful tool for change. The Kennedy Center is honored to play a role in uplifting these artists, as well as advancing their collective impact as a cohort. Our intention is that this Recognition Program takes Citizen Artist Fellows on a journey of investigation, activation, and participation.”

The 2019–2020 Citizen Artists Fellows begin their tenure on Monday, April 29 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 arts and creativity can address critical issues and positively impact society (please see [here](#) for more information on Arts Summit). On-site convenings like the Arts Summit and the Citizen Artist Fellows Retreat are valuable touchpoints throughout the year for the Fellows, as the conversations, ideas, and relationships built during these opportunities 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 use their artistic practice to promote dialogue and affect change within communities. Past Citizen Artist Fellows include violinist and social justice advocate Vijay Gupta, visual artist and community arts educator Michelle Angela Ortiz, and rapper and poet Omar Offendum. 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. In return, the Citizen Artists enrich the Kennedy Center community by sharing their individual artist perspectives and serving as advisors to the Center on new trends, issues, and audiences.

The 2019-2020 Citizen Artist Fellows

David “Olmecca” Barragan (Los Angeles, California) is a hip hop artist, producer, activist and scholar who has helped spawn a new trend of bilingual hip hop. Barragan grew up in the barrios of L.A. and Mexico, a reality reflected in his music, which blends genres and cultures. Praised for his lyrical content and production by both English and Spanish news outlets, his music is also used by educators in their classrooms. This, along with his social commentary and community efforts makes Barragan a stand-alone artist at the intersection of identities and demographics. His work has been featured on documentaries including PBS’s *Two Americans*, and he has also written music for television shows including *Sons of Anarchy*. In addition to being a performing artist, Barragan does guest lectures, residencies, and keynote speeches in universities throughout the U.S. He has been featured on BBC London, *Huffington Post*, NPR, Democracy Now!, and CNN Latino, and his work has been noted by social justice dignitaries speaking alongside Dolores Huerta, Naomi Klein, and many others. He currently resides in Las Vegas, where he teacher in the University of Nevada, Las Vegas’ Interdisciplinary Gender and Ethnic Studies Department.

Sky Cubacub (Chicago, Illinois), is a non-binary, queer, and disabled Filipinx human whose intersectional identity shapes their art and community organizing work. They are the creator of Rebirth Garments, a line of gender non-conforming wearables and accessories that include the full spectrum of gender, size and ability. Rebirth Garments challenges mainstream beauty standards by embodying the ideology of Radical Visibility through the use of bright colors, exuberant fabrics, and innovative designs. The line creates a community where all people can confidently express their individuality and identity. In addition to their design and garment making work, Cubacub’s newest exploration of Radical Visibility is through editing *The Radical Visibility Zine*, a magazine for queer youth with disabilities. They have a BFA with an emphasis in Fibers, Fashion and Performance from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and was named as a Chicagoan of the Year in 2018 by the *Chicago Tribune*.

Mark Gonzales (Los Angeles, California) is a futurist and the Chair of the Dept. Of The Future. He develops tools, tech, and narratives to ignite civic imagination and shape human existence. His love for storytelling led to multiple books, including his first venture into children’s literature, *Yo Soy Muslim*, and leading copy for the iconic #WeThePeople series, which became the most funded art and impact campaign in Kickstarter history. With 20+ years of experience spanning over a dozen countries, his portfolio reads like a lookbook of possibility. It includes connecting artisans, investors, and urban planners to tell the future story of space, pairing kid lit creators with architects to create more child-inclusive cities, convening public trust tables disguised as dinner table conversations, and building real-world applications for the emerging empathy technology field. A chance meeting in the sacred city of Bethlehem between Mark Gonzales and a beautiful Tunisian from Paris led to a life partnership and two children. Their family splits time between Northern Africa, the UK, and the US, building a new generation of trans-Atlantic partnerships that do good, revitalize economy, and foster global citizenship.

Alysia Lee (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) is the founder and artistic director of Sister Cities Girlchoir, an El Sistema-inspired choral academy in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey. She is also the Coordinator of Fine Arts for the Maryland State Department of Education where she shares her vision of equity and excellence across five arts disciplines. As an educator, artist and arts advocate, Alysia has a broad perspective of the arts education ecosystem and has designed and implemented K-12 arts education and professional development programs throughout the east coast. Lee is a graduate of Peabody Conservatory. She also was selected to the third cohort of the Sistema Fellowship at New England Conservatory in partnership with TED. A classically trained mezzo-soprano, Lee is a versatile performer who is equally at home on the operatic and concert stage. Recent recognitions include The Knight Foundation, National Association of University Women, and Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

Emily Marks (Memphis, Tennessee) is the founder and director of Lionheart Live Arts & Youth Theatre, which launched a 2019 season with a focus on developing new work and socially engaged performances that push the possibilities of what theatre for a young person can be. She has produced projects for companies including SXSW, The Fusebox Festival, and most recently Lionheart's National Tour of *Petra And The Wolf*, a large-scale collaboration with Glass Half Full Theatre and indie rock-orchestra collective Mother Falcon. Emily is also proud to be the founder of Girls Rock Camp and an early collaborator and organizer of the Global Girls Rock Camp Movement. She is an alum of the APAP/USC Arts Leadership Fellows, The Wesleyan Institute of Curatorial Practice in Performance, The Lincoln Center Directors Lab and a 2018 MAP recipient. She advocates nationally on the topic of creating safer spaces for artists in the performance field and has been featured on panels for The National Performance Network, The American Realness Festival Discourse Series, and the upcoming TYA USA National Festival and Conference.

Yvonne Montoya (Tucson, Arizona) is a mother, dance maker, consultant, and founding director of Safos Dance Theatre based in Tucson. Originally from Albuquerque, New Mexico, she is a process-based dance maker who creates site-specific and site-adaptive pieces for non-traditional dance spaces. Her choreography has been staged throughout the Southwest, and her dance films have been screened in Tucson, North Carolina, and at the University of Exeter. She is currently working on two solo projects, "Motherhood and the Performing Arts," a multidisciplinary project that explores the challenges and joys of juggling of motherhood with a career in the performing arts, and "Stories from Home" a series of movement vignettes based on her family's oral histories. Montoya was a 2017-2018 Post-Graduate Fellow in Dance at Arizona State University's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, as part of the Projecting All Voices Initiative, during which she organized the inaugural Dance in the Desert: A Gathering of Latinx Dancemakers. She is working with colleagues now to plan Dance in the Desert 2019.

Christina Tsoules Soriano (Winston-Salem, North Carolina) is the Director of Dance and Associate Provost for Arts and Interdisciplinary Initiatives at Wake Forest University. Christina is the creative force behind "IMPROVment®," an integrative method of dance that emphasizes physical and mental wellness. Since 2012, she has regularly taught a community dance class to people living with Parkinson's disease and their care partners and has been involved in three scientific studies that look at the ways improvisational dance can help mobility and balance. She has received funding from the National Parkinson Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC, and most recently the NIH to conduct a clinical trial, testing her dance method in a community of adults living with Mild Cognitive Impairment and their carepartners. She is also very involved in the annual symposium *Wake Forest's Aging Re-Imagined*, which brings together the work of artists, community members and scientists around the topic of Healthy Aging.

Mi'Jan Celie Tho-Biaz, Ed.D. (Santa Fe, New Mexico) is the founder of the New Mexico Women of Color Nonprofit Leadership Initiative at the Santa Fe Community Foundation. One of the *Santa Fe New Mexican's* 2017 "10 Who Made a Difference" and the 2018 recipient of the University of San Francisco's Living the Mission award, Mi'Jan currently serves as faculty with the Banff Centre. Previously, she designed and led the Steinem Initiative's public policy digital storytelling pilot at Smith College. She has also served as a teaching artist for the "Voces de Libertad" poetry program at the Santa Fe County Youth Development Program, as Visiting Scholar at the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics at Columbia University, and as Documentarian-In-Residence at the Institute of American Indian Arts' Essential Studies Department, where the Rockefeller Foundation featured her work. Mi'Jan was the keynote presenter at Stanford University's "Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and the Arts" conference, as well as the Create Justice Forum at Carnegie Hall.

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) 416-8196
MAPendoley@kennedy-center.org

Jasmine Jiang
(202) 416-8464
JJiang@kennedy-center.org