



THE COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
FOR NORTHEAST FLORIDA

Giving Back. Giving Forward.

Art Ventures Begins Its Fourth Decade by Making 14 Grants to Individual Artists in NE Florida

Grantees include three recipients of funding from newly-created Black Artists Endowment

JACKSONVILLE, Florida – April 29, 2021 – Fourteen Northeast Florida artists recently received grants of \$3,500 each as part of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida’s oldest initiative: Art Ventures. After celebrating the 30th anniversary of investing in the local cultural community in 2020, The Community Foundation received the largest number of Art Ventures individual artist applications ever this year. The individuals selected for the 2021 awards include visual artists, writers, composers, sculptors, musicians, and filmmakers who were chosen for their demonstrated talent as well as their aspirations to refine an aspect of their craft.

“It was a very competitive process this year, resulting in a group which has achieved a high level of artistic excellence,” said Amy Crane, senior program director for Art Ventures. “Recipients reflect a diverse range of disciplines, and span the geography of Northeast Florida. We are excited to see how the grants are able to advance the artists’ practices.”

Applications are reviewed predominantly on the basis of artistic excellence, with additional consideration for how the artist is influenced by and impacts Northeast Florida. This year marked the first year of grantmaking from the Delores Barr Weaver Black Artists Fund, which combined with other funds made a total of 14 grants.

These fourteen individual artists represent the most diverse pool of grantees in the initiative’s history, a testimony to the depth of artistic talent in Northeast Florida. They include:

Megan Baker (music/composition) performs regularly with her band, MJBaker, in Northeast Florida, and has released several group and solo recordings. The grant will provide funds to record, produce, edit, mix, and master her new album, “Transparency.”

Raquel Benjamin (visual art/fashion) is an artist activist who uses visual art, creative writing, and fashion to create conversations around political divides and cultural tensions. The grant will fund to create custom apparel for the social commentary project “Great for Who?”

Sarah Stuart Clarke (creative writing) is a published author, freelance journalist, and professor of English at FSCJ. The grant will fund the author’s time to complete a coming-of-age novel set in Northeast Florida.

Danisha Edwards (visual art) received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from UNF, and her Master of Fine Arts from University of New Orleans. Her sculptural works have been exhibited locally and regionally. The grant will support creation of sculptural installations for her exhibit “Trial of Memories.”

Lenny Foster (visual art) is a photographer who operates Gallery One Forty Four in St. Augustine. Recently, he has been working on a series called, “Where We Stand,” which showcases significant leaders and locations in St. Augustine’s Civil Rights history. The grant will assist in completing a series of archival pigment photo images and preparing them for exhibition.

Niam Jones (music/film) is a professional digital media artist and lifelong musician, known locally as Willie Evans, Jr. He has produced award-winning albums and podcasts, as well as toured internationally with the hip-hop group Asamov. The grant will help fund the debut of a socially conscious multi-media project, “The Brown Wonder,” in a projection event in Riverside.

Agnes Lopez (film) is a documentary director and commercial photographer, most notably shooting for the area's top restaurants and national food producers. The grant will support the cost to professionally edit her documentary, "#MORETHANLUMPIA: Jax Filipino Chefs," which highlights the skilled Filipino chefs of Northeast Florida.

Ahyanna Nakia (visual art) is a textile artist whose work has been exhibited locally, as well as at the Nelson Mandela Museum in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The grant will support purchase of equipment for her personal work, and the development of a workshop curriculum to teach young women principles of textile art.

Jennifer Veal (visual art) is an accomplished portrait artist whose work has been displayed in juried shows, local galleries, and held in private collections. Using a hyper realistic approach, Veal will use her grant to complete to a series of artworks entitled, "Zora Neale Hurston: A Genius of the South," celebrating the life of the author and folklorist who indelibly impacted American literature and Florida history.

Jeff Whipple (visual art) has a celebrated career of more than four decades, encompassing 84 solo exhibitions, 18 productions of his original plays, and numerous public art installations. The grant will fund the development of a comprehensive database of Whipple's artwork and a retrospective, autobiographical art catalogue.

Nikesha Williams (creative writing) is an author of four novels whose career as a journalist and performing artist is rooted in Northeast Florida. The grant will support writing, publishing, and producing content for a podcast, among other projects which highlights her work as a storyteller, and that of others, in Northeast Florida.

Jaimie Wilson (creative writing) is a freelance journalist who won several Society of Professional Journalist awards for features on race, culture, and family. She is also the recipient of an artist residency for poetry at the Atlantic Center for the Arts. The grant will support updated equipment and time to complete her first novel, a dystopian adventure of two girls offering a story of emergence, magic, and love.

Vanessa Withun (visual art) is a portrait artist practicing contemporary realism. Her work is widely exhibited and featured in private and permanent collections. She was recently commissioned to complete a portrait of William Sanders Scarborough for a symposium of African American scholars in Savannah, GA. The grant will fund the purchase of materials and equipment to expand her capacity to paint at a larger scale.

Rania Woodard (music/composition) is part of duo, LANNDS, an indie-electronic band which has garnered national and internal press. Having toured to support their recordings, LANNDS played in an official SXSW showcase. The grant will fund a writing retreat for a full-length album supported by film documentation of the process.

Art Ventures began in 1990 as a commitment to invest in local individual artists as well as small arts organizations—and has granted more than \$1.4 million to more than 200 artists and nearly 100 small arts organizations. Funding for Art Ventures Individual Artist grants comes from the Art Ventures Endowment, the Baker Family Advised Fund, the J. Shepard, Jr. & Mary Ann Bryan Arts Endowment, the Delores Barr Weaver Black Artists Endowment, Anne and Sallyn Pajcic Art Ventures Endowment, the Independent Life Minority Arts Fund, and the Alynne Sharp Art Fund.

About The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida

The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, the state's oldest and largest community foundation, works to stimulate philanthropy to build a better community. The Foundation helps donors invest their philanthropic gifts wisely, helps nonprofits serve the region effectively, and helps people come together to make the community a better place. Created in 1964, the Foundation has assets of \$548 million and has made approximately \$600 million in grants since inception. For more information, go to www.jaxcf.org.

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Note to Editors: Images of artists and/or their work are available

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