



**a blade of grass**  
*nurtures socially engaged art*

A Blade of Grass FINALISTS FOR ABOG FELLOWSHIP – Letters of Interest

NAME OF APPLICANT: Jody Wood

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Beauty in Transition is a mobile beauty salon operating near participating shelters to serve the NYC homeless population. Providing beauty services including a hair wash, cut, color, and/or style to willing participants, the project aims to critically engage with broad publics to unravel the reductive label of home-less. This project is the first of its scope and scale, and involves the intersection of three major institutional sectors within NYC: The Nonprofit Arts sector, Homeless Shelters, and Beauty Institutions including salons and educational centers. Joanne Oplustil, President of CAMBA, is in support of the project and will facilitate its operation with their seven New York shelters. I also plan to serve additional city-run shelters. The project was launched as a prototype in Denver, Colorado in June 2013 in conjunction with RedLine Art Center's exhibit, *Between Home and Where I Find Myself*. The salon was open 6 days and made an incredible impact on the community. Homeless participants were moved to tears because someone paid attention to this overlooked need. Volunteer stylists first refused to physically touch their homeless clients and wore gloves to protect themselves. By the second hour of their shifts, they were washing clients' hair without gloves, exchanging hugs, and sharing stories. I collected audio interviews and displayed them within an audiovisual installation in RedLine to facilitate an empathetic listening experience for an art audience. The project sparked an outreach program and stylists from Aveda Salon volunteered to cut hair inside the shelter weekly. I plan to extend the project's reach for the New York iteration by adding the following components: Film: A 20 minute documentary film interviewing participants, social workers, and policy-makers, disseminated in city-wide screenings and panel discussions at art/activism venues to unpack issues surrounding homelessness and the artist's role in society. Workshops: Basic hair-cutting technique workshops taught by volunteer stylists to facilitate sustainability. Scale: Increasing the project duration to 3+ months of operation in NYC, and a projected future US tour, making stops in urban centers most affected by homelessness. The NYC operation and documentary will be completed in the one year grant period. Rather than increased invisibility behind institutional doors of a shelter, this project considers increased visibility through reclaimed authorship to one's self-image, while breaking social barriers of touch that stigmatize someone who has lost housing. The idea of transforming one's hair with a cut, color, or straightening iron is not only about maintaining appearances, it is also a physical manifestation of the transformative process inherent in periods of extreme transition; these periods carry within them not only the experience of loss, but also potential for growth. African-American and Latino New Yorkers are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Although homelessness is a complex issue without an easy answer, I interpret my role as a socially engaged artist to create work which sees beyond utilitarian progression wherein shelters function to maintain a still intact social order, and imagines what equality would look like by delineating a space for a human-to-human dialogue beyond socioeconomic constraints.