Nurturing Socially Engaged Art

A BLADE OF GRASS
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Cover: Still from FIELDWORKS featuring ABOG Fellow Rulan Tangen, whose project, seeds: ReGeneration, convened a series of community visioning sessions and interdisciplinary movement workshops to center Indigenous artistic and ecological knowledge, culminating in a transformative performance ritual in the fall harvest season of 2016. Image: RAVA Films
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Letter from the Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>About</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Our Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Get Involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Deborah Fisher hand gestures captured by Rick Lowe at the 2017 ABOG Fellows Orientation. Image: Rick Lowe
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

A Blade of Grass is the only arts nonprofit that supports socially engaged artists nationwide.

We partner with artists who engage in creative activism; prototype utopian futures; heal communities that struggle with systemic oppression; and both imagine and model collaborative, innovative solutions to intractable social problems.

Socially engaged artists are expanding our sense of what art is, who it’s for, where it happens, and what it does by working in direct, collaborative service to communities. This has concrete, generative effects in the world. Artists who share the creative process can model alternatives, change perspectives, and collaboratively create symbolic and practical shifts in everyday life that inspire deeper commitment to social change.

By providing financial support, content, research, and programs, A Blade of Grass propels this provocative and positive direction artists are taking to enact social change.

- Deborah Fisher
Visitors explore Swale, a floating food forest created by ABOG Fellow Mary Mattingly docked at Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York, 2017. Image: RAVA Films
Socially engaged artists are challenging our understanding of art itself —

expanding our sense of what art is, who it’s for, where it happens, and what it does.
ABOUT

A Blade of Grass is a hybrid arts organization that:

- **Creates** web and print media, engaging public programs, and research about socially engaged art projects

- **Advocates** for artists working in the expanded field

- **Provides** direct financial support to artists

Performance as a part of Harriet's Apothecary Healing Village, organized by ABOG Fellow Adaku Utah and collaborators. Image: RAVA Films
HOW DO ARTISTS CHANGE THE WORLD?
ABOG Fellowship Artists

Sol Aramendi
Xenobia Bailey
Black Quantum Futurism
Courtney Bowles & Mark Strandquist
Mel Chin, Distinguished Artist Fellow 2013-2015
Chinatown Art Brigade
Laura Chipley
Brett Cook
Joseph Cuillier
Stephanie Dinkins
Pablo Helguera
Hello Velocity
Fran Ilich
Suzanne Lacy
Simone Leigh
Rick Lowe
Mary Mattingly
Jan Mun
Rebecca Mwase & Ron Ragin
The Plug-In Studio
Nigel Poor
Ronny Quevedo
Aviva Rahmani
Laurie Jo Reynolds
SexEd
Dread Scott
Ashley Sparks
jackie sumell
Rulan Tangen
Adaku Utah
Frances Whitehead
Jody Wood
Freeman Word
Artist Community Partners

Bronx River Alliance, Bronx, NY
Chinatown Tenant Union, New York, NY
Coal River Mountain Watch, Naoma, WV
Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV), New York, NY
Documenta, Athens, Greece
Emerson residents, Gary, IN
Fundación Museos de la Ciudad, Quito, Ecuador
Houston Health Department, Houston, TX
Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL
Institute for Criminal Justice, Philadelphia, PA
Intertribal Gathering, Pojoaque, NM
Life is Living Festival, Oakland, CA
Lower East Side Girls Club, New York, NY
La Morada Restaurant, Bronx, NY
Maryland Ensemble Theatre, Frederick, MD
Nelson Mandela School for Social Justice, Brooklyn, NY
New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE), Jackson Heights, NY
The New Museum, New York, NY
New York City homeless shelters, NY
Newtown Creek Alliance, Brooklyn, NY
Perspective Gallery, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Plaza de Toros Belmonte, Quito, Ecuador
Recess Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA
Sharswood/Blumberg residents, Philadelphia, PA
STAND with Dignity, New Orleans, LA
St. Louis City Family Court, St. Louis, MO
Tamms Prison & Department of Corrections, Tamms, IL
Washington Irving High School, New York, NY
Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art

The ABOG Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art is a unique hybrid program that pairs the direct financial support artists need to thrive with programming and content creation about socially engaged art projects.

Fellowship projects become the focus of:

- Web and print content
- Innovative public programs
- A short engaging documentary film directed and produced by RAVA Films
- Field research that utilizes collaborative action research methodology
- Curriculum and advocacy that makes the case for more artists working in everyday life

To realize this partnership, artists receive $20,000 in minimally restricted project support.
Fellowship Project Locations

United States:

Oakland, CA
San Quentin, CA
Durango, CO
Chicago, IL
Gary, IN
New Orleans, LA
St. Louis, MO
New York, NY
Cincinnati, OH
Philadelphia, PA
Houston, TX
Augusta + Amherst Counties, VA
Boone County, WV

International:

Quito, Ecuador
Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Municipalities, Mexico
Athens, Greece
The Open Call

ABOG Fellowship applicants are solicited via a nationwide open call that yields about 500 proposals per year.

These applications are a rich source of data that illuminates where artists are working, the forms socially engaged art projects take, and the wide array of social issues that ignite artists’ inspiration.
Since our first Open Call of 2013, 2,394 applications have been received from across the country and abroad.
ABOG Fellows imagine, model, and execute solutions to a variety of social problems. Social issues are self-selected by applicants in the first stage of the application process.
Still from On the Impossibility of Freedom in a Country Founded on Slavery and Genocide, a performance by ABOG Fellow Dread Scott. As an ABOG Fellow, Scott began the Slave Rebellion Reenactment, a project to reenact Louisiana’s German Coast Uprising of 1811, the largest rebellion of enslaved people in US history. Image: © Dread Scott.
Form

Prospective Fellows also create a variety of creative responses to social problems. A social practice project can be anything from activism to legislation. It can take the form of a game, a class, a community center, restaurant, or alternative economy. In each case, both the creative process and its product are relevant to specific people within the context of their everyday lives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Event</td>
<td>970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizing</td>
<td>867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation</td>
<td>709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo/Video</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital/Online</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curating</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Economies</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking Tour</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals/Cooking</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mural</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Day laborers collaborated with ABOG Fellow Sol Aramendi on her project, Apps for Power, to develop a mobile app for users to safely report and share information on wage theft and abusive employers. Image: Jornaler@ App
Public Programs

We create inclusive forums that showcase socially engaged art projects, create opportunities for direct participation in artists’ processes, and investigate the meaning, value, and challenges of social practice.

Decolonizing Workshop with ABOG Fellow Rulan Tangen, 2017. Image: Joelle Te Paske
FIELDWORKS

We create short documentary films that explore the beauty, rigor, and impact of socially engaged art.

The FIELDWORKS series has been screened nationally at venues such as the Oakland Museum of California, Parrish Art Museum, and MassArt. The films have also been showcased by Upworthy, Atlantic Magazine, and Artforum.

Email us at info@abladeofgrass to organize a screening in your community!

Directed and produced by RAVA Films

Stills from FIELDWORKS films featuring projects by ABOG Fellows Laura Chipley (top) and The Plug-In Studio (bottom). Image: RAVA Films
Web and Print

Fellowship projects are dynamic and dependent upon multiple perspectives. To learn more about socially engaged art or the projects we’re working on right now, visit our website! We publish regular reports from project participants and essays by thought leaders in the field.

Future Imperfect

Framed by project participants and some of socially engaged art’s most important thinkers, our first publication, *Future Imperfect*, is an indispensable resource for all things socially engaged art. Participant voices play a key role in features on Fellowship projects, and contributions from Christian Viveros Faune, Tom Finkelpearl, Rick Lowe, Laura Raicovich, and Nato Thompson among others contextualize the ideas, challenges, and opportunities of socially engaged art.
Future Imperfect weaves together accessible scholarship and leading examples of socially engaged art.
Our work is deeply informed by the artists we work with.

Like the artists we support, we prioritize active listening, dialogue, engagement, and creative problem solving. We seek to connect our diverse audiences, communities of service, leadership, and other stakeholders.

This commitment to thoughtful process enacts our values, deepens our understanding of the artists we support, and amplifies the impact of the re-imagining work our artists do.

RAVA Films onsite at ABOG Fellow Simone Leigh’s Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter convening at the New Museum, 2016. Image: Joelle Te Paske
GET INVOLVED

We want you to take part in participatory art!

- **Enjoy** our free web content, public programs, and short films

- **Follow** us on your social media channel of choice to learn more about all things #sociallyengagedart

- **Join** us every November for the Alchemy Awards, our annual benefit dinner honoring leaders in the fields of contemporary art, social justice, and social practice

- **Become** a Fellowship Council member to directly support artists enacting social change and receive great benefits in return

- **Contact** us to make a tax-deductible donation, purchase a copy of our first publication, or host a FIELDWORKS screening in your community

ABOG Fellow Suzanne Lacy’s large-scale community organizing project, *De tu Puño y Letra*, convened hundreds of men and women in Quito, Ecuador to speak out publicly on violence against women. Photo: Raúl Peñaflie
Join the Fellowship Council

Fellowship Council members directly support the ABOG Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art—projects that are strengthening communities and improving lives!

As an important part of our community you’ll receive regular updates on Fellowship projects and invitations to members-only events:

- **First Feast**, our annual spring Fellows welcome party

- **Studio visits**, gallery and museum tours, and other intimate members-only programming

- **Annual VIP reception** with ABOG Fellows

- **Curated tour of the Armory Show**

For more information please contact:
Nicholas Cohn, Director of Development
ncohn@abladeofgrass.org  |  917.923.7982
ABOG Fellows Stephanie Dinkins and Kevin Wiesner aboard Swale at First Feast 2017. Image: Noel McGrath/BFA
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We are forever grateful to the visionary First Field of individuals who supported the ABOG Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art in its first year.

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