
A BLADE OF GRASS



*Top, L to R: Rosten Woo, John Malpede, Henriëtte Brouwers, Ras Cutlass, Monica Sheets, Daresha Kyi
Bottom, L to R: Kevin Bott, Tara Rynders, Amara Tabor-Smith, Ellen Sebastian Chang, Shaun Leonardo*

A Blade of Grass Announces 2019 Fellows for Socially Engaged Art and Partnership with SPART Los Angeles

Brooklyn, NY—March 2019—A Blade of Grass, the only arts nonprofit that supports socially engaged artists nationwide, is pleased to announce their 2019 cohort of **A Blade of Grass Fellows for Socially Engaged Art** as well as a new partnership with Los Angeles-based social practice funder **SPART**.

Artists **Kevin Bott, Ras Cutlass, Daresha Kyi, Shaun Leonardo, Tara Rynders, Monica Sheets**, and collectives **House/Full of Blackwomen** and **John Malpede, Henriëtte Brouwers, and Rosten Woo** will join the growing body of artists that A Blade of Grass supports through direct project funding, research, content, and public programs.

2019 marks the first year of a three-year partnership between A Blade of Grass and SPART to offer the **A Blade of Grass-SPART Fellowship for Los Angeles**, a new fellowship supporting Los Angeles-based projects. “I couldn’t be more excited about this timely investment in the ecosystem of socially engaged artists working in Los Angeles,” said **Alexandra Shabtai**, founder of SPART.

A Blade of Grass is also proud to be working in partnership with **David Rockefeller Fund** to offer the **A Blade of Grass-David Rockefeller Fund Joint Fellowship in Criminal Justice** for the fourth consecutive year. This fellowship examines the transformational roles artists play in a criminal justice context.

The 2019 Fellows will explore issues of criminal justice reform, mental wellness, racial justice, workers’ rights, and gentrification, among others. The final eight projects were chosen from an initial pool of 571 domestic and international proposals, the record number of applications received through the annual A Blade of Grass open call since its inception in 2014. A selection committee comprised of **Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, Suhaly**

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Bautista-Carolina, Khaliah Pitts, Herb Tam, and A Blade of Grass Executive Director **Deborah Fisher** chose these applicants as leading examples of artists engaging community members as equal partners in ambitious and creative collaboration.

Each A Blade of Grass Fellow will receive an unrestricted stipend of \$20,000 and become the focus of field research conducted to document the various methods and outcomes of socially engaged art practices.

About the 2019 Fellows

Marking reentry with ritual

Artist **Kevin Bott** will create *Ritual4Return* (R4R) for formerly incarcerated individuals in New York to develop a rite of passage supporting their reentry to society from prison and jail. R4R participants will utilize tools such as meditation, mask-making, and embodied theater practices to devise a ritual that culminates in a public threshold-crossing to mark the beginning of the next chapter of their lives. Bott is the 2019 **A Blade of Grass-David Rockefeller Fund Joint Fellow in Criminal Justice**.

Facilitating mental wellness through DIY community design

Sci-fi writer, artist, and social worker **Ras Cutlass** will facilitate *Deep Space Mind*, a collaborative space for Philadelphia neighborhoods to evolve their own perspectives on what mental wellness means for their communities, assess what they need to achieve it, and design their own unique low/no-cost healing structures. The project will culminate in the exhibition and publication of the “DSM.215,” a community-sourced and researched compilation of Philly-grown healing practices exemplifying the power of communities to address their own mental wellness outside of traditional Western methodologies.

Creating rituals of healing and well-being for black women and girls

Working collectively as **House/Full of Blackwomen**, choreographer **Amara Tabor-Smith** and theater director **Ellen Sebastian Chang** will collaborate with Oakland-based black women artists, survivors of sex trafficking, and anti-trafficking organizations to create public performances that represent the private rituals of healing and well-being for black women and girls. Developed through intimate dialogues between collaborators, the performance rituals address issues of displacement, well-being, and sex trafficking of black women and girls in Oakland.

Modeling acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth in Christian communities

Filmmaker **Daresha Kyi** will collaborate with a community of self-identified “mama bears”—conservative, Christian mothers who accept and affirm their LGBTQ+ children, despite potential rejection from their religious communities—to create a feature-length documentary film, *Mama Bears*. In partnership with affirming pastors and churches, as well as religious, LGBTQ+, and civil rights organizations across the US, Kyi, her team, and the mama bears will craft a unique outreach plan to bring the mothers face to face with churches and congregations wrestling with “the LGBTQ question” so they can share their powerful testimonies about their journeys of acceptance.

Fostering disagreement and understanding through movement

Artist **Shaun Leonardo** will develop a second iteration of *Primitive Games*, a performance and non-verbal storytelling methodology centered on the communicative possibilities of body language. In a series of

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movement workshops, Leonardo will collaborate with formerly incarcerated individuals, legal advocates, corrections officers, and victims of crime in New York to translate their personal narratives into performative gestures, culminating in an unscripted performance and creating a platform for non-verbal debate and consensus building.

Enacting a development plan for and by the people of Skid Row

Theater artists & activists **John Malpede** and **Henriëtte Brouwers** of performance group Los Angeles Poverty Department and designer **Rosten Woo** will create *How to House 7,000 People in Skid Row and How to Fund It*. The artists will integrate exhibition, organizing, public conversation, and finance research to engage the LA Department of City Planning and Skid Row neighborhood residents to enact “Skid Row Now & 2040,” a community-generated alternative development plan to house and protect all of the neighborhood’s low-income and homeless residents. Malpede, Brouwers, and Woo are the 2019 **A Blade of Grass-SPArt Fellows for Los Angeles**.

Healing hospitals through the arts

Professional dancer and registered nurse Tara Rynders and team will create *First, Do No Harm and The Clinic*, an immersive performance and workshop series designed to bring arts-based practices into hospitals. *The Clinic’s* workshops will teach restorative strategies and self-care tools to nurses at Denver area hospitals, empowering them to more effectively care for themselves and their patients. The program will culminate in *First, Do No Harm*, a live immersive theater performance in a working hospital comprised of participating nurses, actors, dancers, and musicians to address common issues found in the healthcare workplace, such as grief, loss, compassion fatigue, and moral injury.

Amplifying voices from the erotic dance industry

Artist **Monica Sheets** will work with a community of erotic dancers in Minneapolis to create *The Feminist Strip Club*, a workshop series and public artwork to create dialogue around labor structures and stigma in the sex work sector. In workshops, participants will identify how they see their work and how they would like it to be seen by others. They will then create a public artwork to express the self-identified issues they face as workers and their vision for a more equitable field.

Supporters

Our work is made possible through the generous support of a growing family of individual donors and foundation and government partners. We are grateful for major contributions from our groundbreakers **Annette Blum, Agnes Gund, Eva Haller, Shelley Frost Rubin, and Linda Schejola**, as well as from **David Rockefeller Fund; National Endowment for the Arts; SPART; the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation; the American Chai Trust; and the New York State Council on the Arts** with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

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