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News

## Tulsa Foundation Pledges \$1.9M to 10 Artists

Each artist will receive \$190,000 in cash and benefits from the Tulsa Artist Fellowship over a three-year period.

by Lyndsay Knecht  
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Tulsa Artist Fellow J. Preston Witt during Pride June First Friday Open Studios (photo by Marissa Burger; all images courtesy Tulsa Artist Fellowship)

The Tulsa Artist Fellowship (TAF) this week announced major updates to its residency program. Beginning with the 2024 cohort, more than \$1.95 million will be used each year to support 10 artists who

serve three-year terms. The current residency offers a \$40,000 stipend and an estimated value of \$36,000 in resources, such as housing and studio space, to each artist over a period of two years. The latest announcement marks a significant increase in funding from the George Kaiser Family Foundation, which provides support for the program.

According to TAF Executive Director Carolyn Sickles, each artist will now receive more than \$190,000 in money and benefits under the new program, including an additional year of housing and studio space. Additional announcements included the recent appointment of past awardee Nathan Young and film producer and curator Michelle Lee Svenson as artistic program producers.

With these changes comes a new premise of entry. Previously, awards were merit-based, as TAF advertised the residency's focus on "autonomy to explore and expand creative practices." For the new iteration of the fellowship, an annually appointed group of 30 arts professionals will evaluate candidates based on proposals for projects, and artists will be required to realize these using the resources of the residency over the course of three years.



AIA recipient, Kalup Linzy, performing at Tulsa Artist Fellowship's Flagship as alter ego, Taiwan Braswell (photo by Laci Swoegler)

“The new award model represents an expansion of the fellowship rather than a radical shift,” Sickles told Hyperallergic. “Tulsa Artist Fellowship seeks the best artistic minds of today’s cultural landscape and welcomes awardees able to actualize proposed projects during the three-year program term.”

Established by the George Kaiser Family Foundation in 2015, the Tulsa Artist Fellowship has hosted widely known and emerging artists, some of whom claim the Southwest as home and subject. Musician and poet Joy Harjo of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation was a fellow while she was the 2019 poet laureate of the United States. Screenwriter and TAF alum **Blackhorse Lowe**, from the Navajo Nation, has directed episodes of the popular Netflix series *Reservation Dogs* and shown films at Sundance and internationally.

The switch to a project-based fellowship follows a series of incidents at TAF that caused concern among artists about censorship and the organization’s relationship to its Archer Studios location on the site of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. At least three fellows left the program before their terms were complete, the *Art Newspaper* reported in 2020.

One former fellow, a Soviet-born former war correspondent, documented the block on which she lived in Tulsa during her residency. Grantee Anna Badkhen’s name circulated last week on the longlist for the 2022 National Book Award for Nonfiction. She knits together histories of migration and displacement across four continents in *Bright Unbearable Reality*, an essay collection that comes out in October. Her essay “Jericho” opens in Tulsa the day Badkhen moved to Archer Studios in January 2017; across the street, a man is playing a Nat Adderly song on his trumpet in the frigid air.

“Around us, the red brick right angles of a century-old lynching site are being gentrified into a tightly curated hipster haven,” Badkhen writes. “Where a pogromed neighborhood once burned there are now luxury apartment blocks and galleries and yoga studios and a baseball field; a bakery called Antoinette’s displays a window sign that reads EAT CAKE. The neighborhood, like much of Tulsa, again smells like something burning, from the oil refineries that rim the city. I cannot tell if by choosing ‘Work Song’ the man on the corner is flipping a bird at all this cognitive dissonance or playing along to it, or both.”

Badkhen pointed out in a phone interview with Hyperallergic that TAF’s challenges are not unique — any arts residency White people create in the United States must reconcile colonialism with their presence. However, the iteration of the Tulsa Artist Fellowship that Badkhen was a part of, she says, failed to demonstrate any interest in that kind of wrestling. She does not include the TAF on any public list of her awards.

“In my experience, TAF is unique because it was created for the purpose of laundering a space, and it was created with the purpose of using artists to do that,” she says.

In response to Hyperallergic’s request for comment, Sickles added: “We are committed to resisting injustice in all forms and firmly believe that truth and acknowledgment are critical for the work we do. As stated on our public platforms and included in the Fellow orientation materials, Tulsa Artist Fellowship acknowledges that we stand on the land of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and pay respect to the victims and survivors. Furthermore, we acknowledge we stand on the tribal lands of the Osage, Cherokee and Muscogee People, and we respect their elders, past and present.”

TAF’s new Flagship space opened in downtown Tulsa five months after public acknowledgments of the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial. TAF did not organize events at Archer Studios to mark this; according to a TAF representative, the venue was closed to the public. TAF did collaboratively support “Society’s Cage,” a public installation with programming, at AE Vernon A.M.E. Church, organized by awardee Quraysh Ali Lansana and Tri-City Collective, and “The American Dream” by awardee Sarah Ahmad at Oxley Nature Center, co-presented with Greenwood Art Project.

Sickles confirmed the TAF is still considered a “place-based” initiative.

“Awardees are individuals who are durationally committed to working here in their community, individuals with a calling back to place and compelled to be creative in Oklahoma’s generative landscape,” Sickles said.

*Editor’s Note, 9/26/22 4:56pm EDT: This article has been updated to include additional artists and comment from a TAF representative.*