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New Round of Creative Heights Grants Champions Oregon Artists and Community Storytelling

Oregon Community Foundation Invests \$1 Million in Bold Arts and Culture Projects

PORTLAND, Ore. — An Iraqi-American documentary filmmaker shares home-cooked Iraqi meals with U.S. veterans to talk through the war in his home country. An Afro-Fantasy animated short film created with Portland schoolchildren. Kinetic sculptures that tell their stories through touch and vibration instead of sight. These are just a few of the 12 thought-provoking arts and culture projects included in the latest round of Creative Heights grants from Oregon Community Foundation.

The foundation announced today it will invest \$1 million in projects that celebrate bold creativity, elevate cultural voices and explore community issues across Oregon. Grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 are designed to stretch the creative capacity of artists and culture bearers and increase Oregon's cultural visibility and vitality.

“Creative Heights asks artists to dream big and express what they believe matters right now to them personally and for their communities,” said Jerry Tischleder, Senior Program Officer for Arts and Culture at Oregon Community Foundation. “This year’s projects reflect themes that resonate across Oregon and challenge us to bridge our differences.”

OCF’s Creative Heights initiative has invested roughly \$1 million per year since 2014, supporting 165 projects across visual art, performance, folk and traditional arts, film and media, literary arts, museum exhibitions, humanities, music, theater, dance, opera, history, cultural heritage and multidisciplinary works.

New Creative Heights grantees include:

Sahar al-Sawaf (Metro) | Media Arts/Film

For *One Bite for the Godless*, an experimental documentary feature film that follows an Iraqi-American filmmaker sharing Iraqi meals and intimate dialogue with U.S. veterans to confront war through memory and reconciliation.

“I am deeply honored to receive an award of this caliber,” said Filmmaker Sahar al-Sawaf. “I am overwhelmed with gratitude to be granted the rare opportunity to take a chance on a project that will serve to push the limits of my own creativity in unforeseen and immeasurable directions at this moment in time. OCF’s support will be instrumental in elevating my Arab-American voice within Oregon and beyond its borders.”

Arts Council of Pendleton/Roberta Lavadour (Eastern) | Visual Arts

For *By My Hand: Basket Works by Oregon Artists*, supporting the creation of ambitious and experimental baskets and woven works by a juried cohort of 15 Oregon artists for exhibition at the East Oregonian Gallery at the Pendleton Center for the Arts.

“Wow. To have the trust of OCF in creating this program is incredible,” said Roberta Lavadour, Executive Director of the Pendleton Center for the Arts. “And to be able to stretch our programming and offer a totally new opportunity for Oregon artists is a thrill. I’m most excited for the artists. I can’t wait to see the ambitious work they create with this funding.”

Ashland New Plays Festival/Jackie Apodaca (Southern) | Theater

Commissioning a new bilingual play by Oregon Playwright Octavio Solis, drawn from story-gathering with survivors and first responders of Southern Oregon’s 2020 Almeda and South Obenchain fires.

“The 2020 Almeda fire devastated Southern Oregon communities,” said Jackie Apodaca, Artistic Director of Ashland New Plays Festival. “Playwright Octavio Solis, an Almeda fire evacuee himself, is weaving the collected narratives together and creating something that we hope will help our community and others heal. There are, right now, numerous fires burning in Southern Oregon. These stories are relevant and necessary. This is Ashland New Plays Festival’s very first new work commission and I am so very grateful to have the opportunity and support needed to bring this play to life.”

Four Rivers Cultural Center & Museum/Patricia Walker (Eastern) | Performing Arts

For *Where Rivers Meet*, an interactive, multidisciplinary performing arts series bringing artists and residents together across music, theater, comedy and ritual to explore culture, heritage, commonalities and belonging.

“We are deeply grateful to Oregon Community Foundation for believing in this project,” said Patricia Walker, Executive Director of Four Rivers Cultural Center & Museum.

“This funding means so much because it gives Four Rivers Cultural Center the chance to bring artists, culture bearers and community members together in a meaningful way. *Where Rivers Meet* is about honoring the cultures that shape our region while creating space for connection and common ground.”

Spencer Garland (Metro) | Media Arts/Film

For *Counter of Sheep*, an immersive Afro-Fantasy animated short film and extended reality architectural installation about ecological grief, community resilience and the meaning of home when the world is falling apart, co-created with students at Martin Luther King Elementary and Black community members.

“This funding from Oregon Community Foundation helps bring *Counter of Sheep* to diverse audiences across the state,” said Filmmaker Spencer Garland. “The project feels timely, especially with the increase in wildfires this summer. My goal is to create a space where people can show up authentically, in both grief and joy, and imagine/design a new future where all of us feel safe.”

Jason Graham (Central) | Media Arts/Film

For *Sketch + Release*, a statewide tour of a series of lyrical documentaries and performance projects lifting up the experiences of rural Black Oregon-based artists and their relationship to culture, creativity and the land through screenings, performances and dialogue.

“Opportunities like this are rare and exceptionally meaningful for communities like ours,” said Jason McNeal Graham, aka MOsley WOtta. “This support is invaluable and will help us bring Black artists, audiences and rural communities together through storytelling, art and shared experiences.”

IPRC / Harper Quinn (Metro) | Visual Arts

For *Radical Research: Community Archives & Publishing*, a print and publishing project that supports community-based research, reduces barriers to creative publishing and culminates in 10 to 15 publications and educational programs on research, self-publishing, literacy and oral history.

“Artist-publishers are creating some of the most vibrant, inventive and diverse print publications in the field today,” said Poet and Book-Artist Harper Quinn. “It’s a dream to be able to support these creative publishing and community archive initiatives, not just with access to the means of production, but with material support for research, writing, design and print production.”

nũn studios / Sharita Towne (Metro) | Social Practice/Participatory Art, Visual Arts

For *Inalienable AiR*, a multidisciplinary residency and event series of risograph print, music, food and community building for eight BIPOC creatives and cultural organizers across Oregon to develop an edition of prints and publications.

“Legitimately grateful! We’re so excited to support and be in community with creatives and organizers from around the state,” said Sharita Towne, Residency Coordinator, Studio Founder and Lead Artist.

PHAME Academy/Laura Loy (Metro) | Music

Producing and performing an original rock/jukebox-style musical theatre production rooted in disability pride and built through a collaborative creative process centered on adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

“This grant will allow PHAME to provide an accessible rehearsal and performance process for our students,” said Laura Loy, Project Director, PHAME Senior Manager, Education. “We are thrilled to be able to amplify the voices of artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the Portland arts scene!”

Dillon Simeone (Metro) | Social Practice/Participatory Art

For *The Haptic Petting Zoo*, an interactive installation and touring exhibition of autonomous kinetic sculptures that communicate artistic narratives exclusively through touch, vibration and thermal feedback.

“Most art asks people to stand back and look, but this project is designed to be understood entirely through the skin,” said Artist and Design Engineer Dillon Simeone.

“With this funding from Creative Heights, we can build a durable, touring tactile world where touch isn’t just an accommodation; it’s the primary language.”

Erica Thomas (Metro) | Literary Arts

For *The Fires That Bind Us*, a series of workshops with formerly incarcerated wildland firefighters to develop a book, a visual and multisensory art exhibition, and an event series focusing on the labor and exploitation of those doing Oregon’s forestry work from prison.

“I’m excited to expand this project, to create new ways for Oregonians to make connections across the deep divides between urban and rural communities, and between people inside and outside the prison system,” said Artist Erica Thomas. “The project will facilitate dialogue across the state about how both land and people are controlled and exploited, and about our widely varied experiences with wildfire.”

Willamette University/Marsha Mack (Metro) | Visual Arts

For *Double Vision: New Perspectives on Old Town*, a living history and community-focused art exhibition telling the changing story of Portland’s Old Town neighborhood through ambitious new works by four artists operating within Oregon’s Asian cultural diaspora, plus free public programming by local nonprofits.

“Support from the Oregon Community Foundation allows us to celebrate our community partners who help carry the legacy of Old Town’s immigrant communities,” said Marsha Mack, Assistant Director of Galleries and Exhibitions at the Pacific Northwest College of Art at Willamette University. “It’s such an honor to work with the people and organizations dedicated to Old Town’s future, and this direct investment back into the community is joyful and energizing at a time when it’s really needed.”

Find a full list of the new Creative Heights grantees [here](#).

About Oregon Community Foundation

Since 1973, Oregon Community Foundation has worked to improve the lives of all Oregonians through the power of philanthropy. In partnership with donors and volunteers, OCF strengthens communities in every county in Oregon through grantmaking, scholarships and research. Individuals, families, businesses and organizations can work with OCF to create charitable funds to support causes important to them. To learn more, visit oregoncf.org.

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