

SOROS ARTS FELLOWSHIP IMPACT REPORT

2018–2022



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The artists whose work is featured in this report have used their voices to speak to the power of socially engaged art to create positive and transformative change in society. Their work has given shape, depth, and nuance to the report by amplifying the experiences and perspectives of communities of artists around the world. Their courage and resilience have provided invaluable insights and inspiration. We are grateful to all the Soros Arts Fellows for their unwavering commitment to building a more livable and sustainable future for individuals and communities across the globe. Their voices are vital in creating a more inclusive, open, and equitable society, and we are grateful for their contributions. They inspire us to reimagine what is possible.

Introduction

We are living in an age of extremes. Rising authoritarianism and political instability. Profound inequality. Unprecedented climate disasters caused by a rapidly heating planet. To rise to these challenges, we need to envision and build new political and social realities. We need to dream and scale more powerful movement and community building. We need to create novel ways of challenging power and inspiring change.

Socially engaged artists and cultural producers are at the forefront of imagining, inspiring, and catalyzing collective liberation and building momentum for change. This is why, in this moment, their work is more vital—and more threatened—than ever.

Since 2018, the Open Society Foundations' Soros Arts Fellowship has supported innovative mid-career artists across the globe using art and public space to advance pluralistic, democratic, and just societies. What has been the impact of this support on the fellows, their practices, and their broader communities? In addition to assessing the influence of support for individual fellows, this report also examines the impact that the program has had on philanthropy.

These were the questions that animated the development of this report. The insights offered here are based on interviews with selected fellows, Open Society Foundations staff and program advisors, project reports by cohorts from the first three cycles of the fellowship program, and recent strategy discussions that have shaped the program moving forward.

We hope that the insights and findings from this report will be useful for others working in the fields of arts, human rights, and social justice, and that they spur dialogue and allyship across these fields which our world so urgently needs now.

Why Invest in Socially Engaged Artists and Cultural Producers?

In a world facing multiple political, social, and economic challenges, artists can play a significant role in fomenting positive social change.

Widespread social and economic inequality has eroded confidence in democratic institutions. Extremists have been swift to capitalize on this unrest with hate and disinformation campaigns that scapegoat underrepresented communities—from religious minorities to migrants—for society’s ills. Today, less than a fifth of the world’s population lives in countries that are considered “free,” according to a recent report on the state of political rights and civil liberties worldwide.¹

These trends were years in the making, according to Alvin Starks, director of Narrative and Culture Change at the Open Society–United States. “We’re up against a multidecade structure and strategy that has really boomeranged our understanding of very basic democratic principles. That includes how people think about race, gender, the economy, government, and technology.”

In the face of these challenges, artists, as they have throughout history, are building new imaginaries, making space for more equitable and inclusive futures, and inspiring audiences to stand up for justice and envision new realities.

“There is a level of fearlessness that artists have,” said Ayoka Wiles, division director of Culture and Art, Expression at the Open Society Foundations. “They work in spaces where they are not afraid to interrogate, face, and protest against injustices. They have their own sense of agency, a positioning in the world where they are unafraid to push buttons, to probe, and ask critical questions.”

¹ [*New Report: The Global Decline in Democracy Has Accelerated* | Freedom House](#)

This fearlessness has put artists and other cultural producers at grave risk. Threats, harassment, and persecution of artists worldwide are on the rise, according to recent studies by PEN America and Freemuse, an organization advocating for freedom of expression, which documented 1,200 violations of artistic freedom in its 2022 report.² “Artists are the last voices of hope but also the first to come under attack,” said Tatiana Mourabes, senior team manager of Culture and Art.

It’s this capacity to inspire hope that makes artists the ultimate disruptors—and their work more urgent and necessary as nationalist authoritarianism surges across the globe.

“One of the most important things that artists and culture producers do is help us imagine how our worlds, our lives, our communities, our societies could be organized better and more equitably,” said Mary Fitzgerald, director of Expression at the Open Society Foundations. Whether it’s through provoking laughter by using satire or manifesting new realities, artists “help unlock our imagination about what could be different.”

“Culture carries political ideas. We only get to the Civil Rights Movement because of the Harlem Renaissance,” said Starks. “You have to ignite not only the mind, the spirit, but the belief in something that is unseen: that is what culture does.”

2 *Art Is Power: 20 Artists on How They Fight for Justice and Inspire Change*

What Is Socially Engaged Art?

Socially engaged art is often described as a category of artistic and cultural practice that is time-bound, collaborative and participatory, process-driven, and political and social in nature.

That said, the Soros Arts Fellowship program does not operate with a static definition but one that is continuously expanded by its grantee-artists. Our work is informed by two simultaneous beliefs: 1) art in and of itself is essential and can serve as a resistance strategy, and 2) art and culture are critical and necessary vehicles for achieving equity and social change through reconfiguring and redistributing power in society. Socially engaged artwork often shares, but is not limited to, these characteristics:

- **Collaborative:** Others are often involved and empowered in cocreating the artwork from aesthetics to outcomes, including community members, scholars, activists, and others with experience and insights to offer.
- **Participatory:** Audience members are sometimes invited to take part in the artwork, expanding traditional relationships between the work and its audience, and blurring the line between art and life.
- **Issue-focused:** The artmaking is instigated by sociopolitical realities and the desire to intervene on these issues through community engagement and advocacy that challenge dominant narratives and that activate spaces for radical resistance and empathy.
- **Site-specific:** While socially engaged art can take place in galleries and museums, its practitioners often engage specific neighborhoods, public spaces, or other community-based settings whose local context is meaningful for the work.
- **Process-centered:** The creative process, including the ethical decisions involved and interactions that take place, is considered as meaningful and important as the final, tangible “product.”
- **Ethically driven:** Artists are rooted in the communities and hold positions of legitimacy, trust, and accountability within these communities. Their practice is attuned to the power dynamics at play and committed to lifting the agency of others in the making of their artwork in meaningful ways.

Fellow Spotlight

FAUSTIN LINYEKULA

2018 Fellowship

Democratic Republic of the Congo



Stories from Home

When the choreographer, dancer, and stage director Faustin Linyekula learned he'd been selected for a Soros Arts Fellowship, his thoughts turned immediately to Kisangani, the town in northern Congo where he has lived since 2001.

While Linyekula is decades into an award-winning career staging and performing works at festivals and venues worldwide. "Stories from home is what inspires me," he said. "If I'm to be really honest with this work, I have to be back home."

His ambition for his fellowship period was twofold: First, he wanted to push himself beyond his own comfort zone by teaching himself new ways of telling and sharing stories, or as he describes it, of "inventing magic from our reality." Second, he wanted to tap into the vision that had animated his decision two decades earlier to found Studios Kabako in his hometown as a space to nurture visual theater and dance. Out of these two impulses, an idea emerged: filmmaking.

While Linyekula has toured works across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, staging these performances requires a crew, which is costly, and the performance spaces themselves are often no more than a concrete block in a public square. But by working with film, a popular and more agile medium, Faustin hoped to reach broader audiences across the country. And who better to make the films than the young people of Kisangani?

The artist recruited a group of 15 youth, none of whom had previous film experience. Then again, neither did Linyekula. While cinema had long been a passion of his, it was not a medium he'd ever had the resources or time to fully explore. For Linyekula, it was meaningful to take a leap of faith with these young film aspirants, just as the Open Society Foundations had taken a risk on him with a significant amount of unrestricted funding. They would learn by doing together.

“If there’s anything this fellowship did for me, it was really to put trust in local capacities. So, you learn by doing, by making, and you trust in that process.”

Faustin Linyekula

“How Do We See Ourselves?”

The first thing Linyekula had the young people do as part of their training was to walk through their neighborhoods with a camera and ask themselves what they would choose to photograph and explain why. The point was to have them shift their gaze inward and use their judgment as the first step to decolonizing their minds, Linyekula explained. “We are in a colonial state, so we don’t see value in who we are,” he said. “That is why anyone coming from the West...getting that out of our brains is difficult.”

Over a 19-month period, the crew finished two short films for the fellowship project, which Linyekula dubbed the *Lubunga Files* after the Kisangani neighborhood where the films were shot. Both shorts tell the stories of everyday people; a longer scripted film based on the true story of a bicycle taxi driver’s improbable, grassroots-driven rise to political office, is in postproduction. Linyekula had the shorts play at the beginning of a series of feature film screenings across town that have attracted as many as 300 people at a time. Audiences have delighted in seeing their world reflected back to them and have even shouted along with the dialogue.



Faustin Linyekula reviews video with residents participating in a project with his dance company, Studios Kabako, in Kisangani, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Photo courtesy of Studios Kabako/Faustin Linyekula

Investing in People

“What can I build here that will also make us want to stay?” This is the question that drives Linyekula’s life-long mission and quest. With the *Lubunga Files* as a foundation, his dream is to build a viable creative industry in his hometown, and by extension, his home country. Young people would not feel compelled to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

The young people on his film crew give him hope. “If your project is for 1 year, grow rice. If it is for 10 years, plant trees. If it is for 100 years, educate children,” he said, citing a Confucian proverb.

One young woman in the crew impressed Linyekula so much with her sharp questions and discerning eye that he invited her to be a dramaturg—an essential role to inform the production through research and advising—on his next performance work. Another young man was tapped by a Lisbon-based choreographer who’d been assisting with the project to work with him on a future production.

“Art Is Not a Luxury”

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, holding a camera can be considered as threatening as holding a gun, Linyekula acknowledged. But because he and his crew are well-familiar with the terrain, they’ve been able to shoot on location in ways outsiders may not have been allowed to do. Even so, filming was interrupted several times in response to tensions in the region between local authorities and civilians. More recently, the community film screenings that had proven so popular had to be shuttered due to political instability and threats to public safety.

And yet it is precisely during times of instability and unrest that arts and culture are most needed, Linyekula insists. “If you drain culture out of a nation, you are actually sentencing this nation to death,” he said, paraphrasing the late Czech French author Milan Kundera. “Because we need these spaces where we can look at ourselves as a people. We can look at our fear. We can look at our hopes and reinvent ourselves.”

“We need to make art because this is the only way we can reinvent ourselves over and over and over again. It is important to remember that art is not a luxury. The fact that enslaved people in the Americas could still invent the blues is testimony that art is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity. So how do we fund art? How do we support organizations like Studios Kabako and many, many others across the most fragile parts of our planet in a sustainable manner?”

Faustin Linyekula

Fellow Spotlight

DEBORAH ANZINGER

2020 Fellowship

Jamaica



Back to Her Roots

When Deborah Anzinger first began searching for local artisans in Jamaica’s Maroon Town to collaborate with on her fellowship project, she learned that most practitioners of traditional weaving and basketry had left the rural countryside for Montego Bay, where they were able to make a better living teaching craft workshops to tourists. This was the case with Keen Sakes, a weaver who left home for a hotel job in Montego Bay until he was laid off during the pandemic. By the time Anzinger found him in Maroon Town, he was making ends meet by doing yard work and odd jobs.

For Anzinger, a painter, sculptor, and video and sound artist based in Kingston, the situation reaffirmed her commitment to a project that had long fueled her imagination but that had eluded her for lack of time and means: Transform a plot of land that has been in her family for generations but fallen into neglect into a site for cultural and agricultural renewal. The artist was drawn to Maroon Town’s significance as a historic site of resistance with a lasting legacy of liberation: wars between escaped enslaved people and the British in the 1700s resulted in

liberating the area from colonial rule. Among the first lands to be owned by Africans in the Caribbean, Maroon Town today remains a mostly agricultural satellite of Montego Bay.

Training Stations, the name of Anzinger's project, is a term borrowed from the Jamaican government's data-mapping of rainforests that were then used to rationalize turning over protected lands to mining interests. Anzinger co-opted the term for her own data-gathering of traditional and endangered cultural and agricultural practices that she hoped would help restore Maroon Town as a site of community-based reinvention. The project is anchored by a striking 100-square-foot sculpture dwelling made from local materials—soil, grass, and bamboo—surrounded by a reforestation effort. "It was important to me that whatever we built was from the space and could just as easily go back to the space."

Creating the project under pandemic conditions was extremely difficult, said Anzinger, who found herself struggling with childcare for two small children as well as supporting a number of community members with medical challenges. Her family's health insurance, which had been provided through her husband's university job, was abruptly cut off. "Everything, the economy, just everything started shutting down," she said. Meanwhile, the cost for labor and materials had skyrocketed. Deadlines were missed. Anzinger's initial plan to use the sculpture as a communal learning space for children was thwarted by resurgent breakouts of COVID-19.

"Honestly I think that I had a lot of shame," said Anzinger. She felt she wouldn't be able to pull off the project she'd been entrusted to do. But the convenings with her fellowship cohort were a boon. "Hearing that other fellows had these challenges as well and how incapacitated we just were collectively helped me work through a lot of that guilt. That was really helpful."

Growing Trees, Growing Social Connections

Today, the project is blooming. With her team, Anzinger has planted hundreds of trees—including cashew, avocado, pimento, and Blue Mahoe, Jamaica's national tree—on her family's land. The site has hosted weaving workshops for students and artists from Jamaica and the United States and has two onsite artist residencies devoted to sustainable cultural sculpture and practices. Anzinger is now pursuing funding to realize her dream of offering programs for children in partnership with local schools and conservation organizations.

The evolving relationships between people—and to the life that is growing on the land—have both sustained the project and allowed it to expand. Those relationships are also important outcomes in and of themselves. "Affirming people and what they do is important," said Anzinger. "That is more important than any structure that was built or could be built."



Participants learning ancestral weaving techniques during Deborah Anzinger's project *Training Stations* in Maroon Town, Jamaica, on July 23, 2019.

Photo courtesy of Deborah Anzinger

Redefining Value on the Ground

The entrenched legacy of colonialism and false debt has scarred generations of Jamaicans and devalued Indigenous art and cultural practices, said Anzinger. “We are so obviously evidently living through the aftermath of centuries of dispossession [at the hands of] the Global North. So, it is absurd to think that we would be living in a space that wasn't also dispossessed of capital.” And yet despite this, cultural knowledge thrives “because arts and culture inherently [serve] the lives, the imaginations, and the well-being of the people that the culture comes out of.”

What can be more creative, Anzinger argued, than sustaining a life lived on the edge of precarity? “There is so much important daily work and struggle that is just not acknowledged and not seen. Maybe we also need to look into how we define what is considered to be, even, a creative practice. People want to see what is big, what is grand, and that is not always the most important work. I think people should be funded to do the work that often looks invisible.”

Who Are the Artists Uplifting Open Society?

Recipients of the 18-month Soros Arts Fellowship are selected by a diverse global committee from a long list of nominations with a focus on voices from historically underrepresented communities and the Global South and its diasporas, where some of the most consequential yet under-resourced work is being made today—and where artists who make work in public spaces are at particular risk.

The fellowship is the largest award for socially engaged art in the world and is part of the Open Society Foundations' Culture and Art program.

One previous recipient is Khalid Albaih, a Sudanese political cartoonist, artist, activist, and freelance journalist who first came to prominence during the Arab Spring for his trenchant political cartoons. At the height of the citizen uprising, his iconic protest images were ubiquitous, reproduced as graffiti in the streets of Tunis and Cairo—and shared feverishly online. When Albaih received news of his fellowship, he had fled Qatar and was living in exile in Copenhagen after receiving multiple death threats. “He is an artist who has put his life, his safety, everything, on the line,” said Mouarbes.

“The artists we have supported are not just exceedingly talented, they are extraordinarily brave,” said Ruby Lerner, an advisor to the fellowship program.

A principal criterion in the selection process is whether receiving the award could prove catalytic at this moment in the artist's career.

“These are some of the most brilliant minds in the world today,” said Wiles. “Will being part of this fellowship allow them to make a next leap?” That “next leap,” Wiles said, is the momentum needed to propel artists' ideas—and ideals—forward to advance open society in their communities and the world: “What are they envisioning for the future? How might they push the dial on climate change? What is it they can see that can expose injustice through their work?”

How Do We Envision Support?

Developed in conversation with artists and activists in the field, the Soros Arts Fellowship shares DNA with the Open Society Foundations' grant-making ethos: entrust the organizations and individuals with substantial, unrestricted grants with an eye to building power, self-reliance, and long-term sustainability.

These are the core elements of the fellowship:

1. We invite fellows to make large-scale projects—on their own terms and in their local contexts.

Fellows are encouraged to develop concepts they may not have previously been able to realize for lack of time or resources, or to take on a project that launches them, on the level of craft or scale, into bold and exhilarating terrain. For many of the fellows, the fellowship was an opportunity to make work independent of commissions that often tie them to specific curatorial visions or venues in North America or Europe—far afield from places where they've longed to center their work for cultural, historical, or political reasons.

"The approach we take is that no scale is too small and no scale is too big," said Fitzgerald. "The reason why we support artists to work in their own context is because some of the most important work that we support is done by artists by, for, and with the communities they serve."

2. We support the artist (not just the project).

The Soros Arts Fellowship program selects artists and cultural producers not only for their existing bodies of work, but based on our conviction that they will continue to make significant contributions in their communities and for the health of the planet.

"We see artists in the same light as economists, environmental scientists, and other professionals in disciplines that are working to solve real-world issues," said Mouarbes. Like innovators in other fields, artists are deserving of a supportive ecosystem that fortifies their creativity and growth.

In the first cycles of the program, fellows received \$85,000 in **direct and unrestricted funding** (in 2023, Culture and Art increased the award to \$100,000). The program also offers **capacity building and individualized support**. Throughout their grant period, fellows meet regularly one-on-one with Soros Arts Fellowship team members to troubleshoot their projects and longer-range issues, from

financial security to staffing and technical needs, to help structure their practice and sustain their careers as artists.

These programmatic offerings are a deliberate rejection of the “here’s a check, send us a report” transactional approach to philanthropy, said Lerner. “Our goal is for people to leave us stronger than when they came in.”

3. We’re building a community of global allies.

Socially engaged artists represent a relatively small but electrifying subset of the arts field. Many of them work outside the traditional parameters of the art world; others may not even be aware that there are other artists like them with similar practices or goals. According to Mouarbes, this isolation is by design, whether it’s authoritarian states cracking down on resistance narratives or a conservative marketplace that discredits socially engaged art as commercially unviable.

The Soros Arts Fellowship program is working to counter these trends by expanding and strengthening the field of socially engaged artists and cultural producers through convenings, forums, cohort gatherings, and public programs, taking into account research that shows how important ideas and breakthroughs are more likely to emerge through formal and informal meetings and collaboration, not from working alone.

“This is a unique element of the award, to focus on breaking down the isolation that individuals doing socially engaged art face,” said Mouarbes. Being a part of a community also fosters resilience and well-being for artists who often face significant stress because of the nature of their work.

Fellow Spotlight

TANIA EL KHOURY

2019 Fellowship

Lebanon



Creating Freely

Tania El Khoury has made a career of touring worldwide with her unique “live art” and participatory performances that narrate the political realities of borders, displacement, and state violence. She saw the Soros Arts Fellowship as an opportunity to develop a new work free of the constraints that come with most arts commissions, including the performance space itself and the audience.

El Khoury’s original concept for her fellowship project was a site-specific installation in the town of Akkar where her family lives on the Lebanon-Syria border. The installation would

transmit border stories using a long-range sonic device developed for naval communications that has been co-opted by law enforcement as a weapon to disperse crowds. But the project became logistically difficult when the Lebanese military began encroaching on greater swaths of territory along the border, cutting off public access to the area. Then came the October 17 uprising. Waves of mass protests and government crackdowns swept through the country. Six months later, COVID-19 stopped the world in its tracks.

Working Better vs. Working More

El Khoury, whose touring schedule had ground to a halt, felt fortunate to have the fellowship and a teaching post to weather the worst of the storm. With encouragement from the fellowship staff, she used this period of relative quiet to reflect on where she was in her career and what she most needed.

“I think the support that I usually get as an artist is very much linked to how I could be a better art worker, you know, like how can I create and do it well,” El Khoury said. “But my experience with this particular fellowship was more like: ‘What do you need? How could we help you achieve what you want to achieve? How do you imagine yourself in a few years? What would help you get there, and what are the other things that we can support you with that we don’t know about?’ It was more like artist-led and artist-focused support.” El Khoury concluded that, at this stage in her career, touring more was not the priority. What she most needed was a virtual assistant to help with the administrative tasks that ate into her creative time.

Cultural Exchange Rate

Forced to abandon her original fellowship concept, El Khoury shifted gears. A new live art performance work emerged: *Cultural Exchange Rate*. Based partly on the artist’s interviews with her late grandmother and oral histories collected in Akkar, the work delves into her family’s memories of living in a border village, which audience members experience by combing through “secret boxes” containing a valueless currency collection and other mementos of more than a century of border crossings.

Pioneering a New Artist-Led Model

This summer, El Khoury received a three-year \$2 million grant from the Mellon Foundation. The funding is designed to support her work and livelihood in partnership with the Fisher Center at Bard and the Open Society University Network’s Center for Human Rights and the Arts, which El Khoury founded and directs. This work will focus on developing and reimagining what an artist-led collaboration between an institution and an artist can look like.

For El Khoury, this means creating models that allow for greater artistic agency and less bureaucracy and drawing stronger connections between projects happening in different parts of the world by bringing them together in conversation, publications, and other platforms—extending the reach beyond Western audiences and rewarding risk.

Part of that risk means risking failure. With the research and process-driven kind of work she makes, “there is always an opportunity for failure,” El Khoury said. The key is to permit a space for failure to happen, and to develop and learn from what didn’t work. “I trust the process of [working with] people rather than the specific project. I also think about all of it as potential...potential for growth and potential for creating a shift in collective thinking about a certain subject.”

That shift begins by making sure that systems of care, trust, and equity are at the root of the process. For El Khoury, that means impacting the people right next to you, including your collaborators, as the first step to having an impact in the wider society. It’s an ethic that she tries to infuse into everything that she does. “I think practicing the politics that we are aiming for—not as a result, but also as a process—is key.”

What Has Been Our Impact?

Can art change the world? How do we measure the impact of a protest song, or trace the ripple effects of a theater work about mass incarceration from one part of the world to another?

Answering these questions would involve delving into research that examines how ideas spark and take hold—and how the transmission of information can resemble a swarm or an activated neural network. This is beyond the scope of this report. What we do know is that arts and culture are powerful drivers of change and the establishment of new norms. And that there can be no political change without cultural change.

“People’s human rights, freedoms, and civil liberties are being trampled on in places where there are regular elections,” said Fitzgerald. “But if you have democratic culture”—one where people’s rights, freedoms, and self-expression are respected—“then you’re more likely to have true democracy.”

Below are three impact areas where we believe the Soros Arts Fellowship has made a meaningful contribution.

1. Igniting a Catalytic Effect

With their formal daring and passion for social change, socially engaged artists are creators of “freedom dreams,” according to Starks. For many of the artists we supported, the fellowship was the infusion they needed to turn a dream deferred into reality. The catalytic effect of the award was as varied as the projects themselves. For a number of fellows, the award proved catalytic for their career

trajectory and for their capacity to support transformative change within their communities; others used it to take their practice in new directions. In each case, the social issues core to their concerns received broader attention from global audiences and influencers.

Tlingit and Unanga artist and musician Nicholas Galanin (2020 Fellowship) was able to realize his monumental installation in the California desert, a sign that read INDIANLAND, at the same scale as the landmark HOLLYWOOD sign it referenced. The work, titled *Never Forget*, became an instant icon—and a call to action—for the land back movement, which aims to “put Indigenous lands back in Indigenous hands.” *Never Forget* has not only brought questions of Indigenous land repatriation into the forefront of mainstream discourse through widespread social media engagement, but also has encouraged deeper participation in the land back movement through a campaign that has raised over \$55,000 to support the acquisition of “legal title to Native American homelands for Indigenous tribal communities.”

Years before she received the Soros Arts Fellowship, Laurie Jo Reynolds (2018 Fellowship) led a groundbreaking public art campaign that successfully shut down a notorious “supermax” prison in

Illinois by mobilizing a volunteer coalition through grassroots organizing, letter-writing campaigns, and advocacy. Building on this work and its success, Reynolds focused on righting the injustices of restrictive policies that prevent people with convictions from securing work and housing once they've completed their sentence. By collaborating with formerly incarcerated people, community groups, and families through a public art and advocacy campaign, Reynolds propelled a statewide reform effort that again resulted in victory: In 2021, Illinois became the first state in the nation to lift barriers to public housing for people with criminal convictions.

Guadalupe Maravilla (2019 Fellowship) began his fellowship by offering healing workshops for Central American and Latinx immigrants in New York. This practice expanded to 120 sound bath performances for thousands of people—including immigrants, cancer survivors, and others in search of healing from trauma both physical and mental—which facilitated individual and collective healing in community and arts spaces during the pandemic. Maravilla was inspired by his personal experience as an immigrant and a cancer survivor who underwent sound bath sessions drawn from Indigenous shamanistic traditions. The healing properties of the artist's sound baths are activated by "disease throwers," otherworldly sculptures made from steel, fibrous materials, and gongs. Maravilla, who spent months combining healing sessions with mutual

aid distributions of food and money for undocumented communities, has since exhibited and performed with his sculptures at museums worldwide—attention he hopes to leverage to build a permanent center as a space for communal healing.

2. **Creating Sustainability and Resilience**

A key goal of the fellowship program is to support the fellows' long-term success and resilience as working artists. Our strategy of selecting fellows with deep roots and influence in their communities anticipated the exponential effect of artists paying it forward: A number of fellows launched enterprises that generated jobs and opportunities for people in their local community and in creative industries. These regenerative models—grounded in the ethics of care, respect, and agency—have improved people's lives in concrete ways. By seeding alternative funding structures rooted in the local context, we are envisioning more sustainable ecosystems where artists, other people, and whole communities can thrive.

Hassan Darsi (2018 Fellowship) in collaboration with his neighbors, transformed their rural village near the Benslamine Forest in Morocco into an agro-ecological village with organic permaculture farms and family-run restaurants—defeating an environmentally destructive quarry project with a green alternative of their own (See page 25).

Khalid Albaih (2018 Fellowship) founded FADAA, a nonprofit online venture designed to match artists and other creatives with donated spaces and facilities inspired by the Sudanese ethos of community-based sharing.

In response to the pandemic crisis, a number of our fellows including Faustin Linyekula (2018 Fellowship; see page 8), Guy Regis, Jr. (2018 Fellowship), and the creative team of Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme (2020 Fellowship) redirected their own Soros emergency grant to support other artists they were collaborating with on their projects and within their local and regional arts sectors. Independent curator Amanda Abi Khalil (2020 Fellowship) funded Lebanese artists whose lives were upended by the Beirut port blast (see page 35).

Maravilla's commitment to instigating microeconomies has involved hiring artisans to fabricate his work and integrating items purchased from markets along his migration journey. He has hired dozens of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program recipients, former students, and others to help with his healing performances, and a cook to make meals at a Brooklyn church where he offered weekly sound baths for the congregation of largely undocumented immigrants during COVID-19. More recently, Maravilla gave a \$100,000 grant he had received from the Art for Justice Fund to the church. Last year, when governors began bussing migrants to sanctuary cities including New York,

Maravilla, in partnership with others, turned his gallery and the Brooklyn Museum where he had a show, into drop-off sites for clothes, toiletries, and other essentials.

For visual artist Tiago de Sant'Ana (2020 Fellowship), receiving the fellowship proved transformative for his career. He received his first major profile in a national media outlet and has since exhibited in prominent art institutions in Brazil and Europe, secured gallery representation, and held curatorial positions, all of which have elevated the visibility of his work, which explores the tensions and representations of Afro-Brazilian identities and the enduring legacy of colonialism and racism in Brazil.

For both Paloma McGregor (2019 Fellowship) and Deborah Anzinger (2019 Fellowship), the award gave them time to develop new projects in their respective homelands in the Caribbean and allowed them to realize their dreams of building creative hubs in the Global South that sustain and evolve Indigenous cultural practices. Through her project, McGregor convened a virtual monthly study group that brought together artists, cultural workers, and guest speakers around the topic of disaster capitalism in St. Croix—an initiative that she plans to continue building on by developing an in-person study group over the coming year (see page 32). Aiming to nurture and sustain local artists and cultural producers, Anzinger bridged her work with New Local Space—a contemporary

art initiative she founded in 2012 in Kingston—with her project in Maroon Town. Her efforts took the form of weaving workshops for students and artists and the creation of two onsite artist residencies devoted to sustainable cultural sculpture and practices, as well as future plans to offer programs for children in partnership with local schools and conservation organizations (see page 12).

3. Fostering a Culture Where Open Societies Can Thrive

All the Soros Arts fellows produced work that brought to the fore the values of individual freedom and pluralism, which are increasingly under threat today. Many of their projects were intersectional in nature, exposing interlocking systems of injustice. A number of fellows addressed the harmful legacies of historical revisionism and cultural erasure through bold works of reclamation, drawing on Indigenous knowledge and practices that can be transformative now and into the future.

“Artists do help envision possible futures, but to me it is more critical that they are willing to shine a light on the uncomfortable past,” Lerner said. “We can’t build a future on a pack of lies.”

The visual artist and filmmaker Bouchra Khalili (2019 Fellowship) developed an ambitious mixed media installation that investigates the forgotten history of the Movement of Arab Workers and its theater groups, which culminated

in the 1974 presidential campaign of an undocumented Maghrebi worker. Leveraging the fellowship to deepen years of research, Khalili created *The Circle Project* to challenge “normative conceptions of belonging and citizen membership” through collective storytelling. Building on its positive reception at venues in multiple countries, Khalili is currently working with a publisher to develop “a visual and textual examination” of the research behind *The Circle Project*. The publication will feature transcriptions of as yet to be published interviews with deceased founding members of the Movement of Arab Workers and rare archival material as an extension of her interest in using film and art to “envision more egalitarian and inclusive forms of communities.”

In *MISSING FOREVER*, Regina Jose Galindo (2019 Fellowship) détourned the convention of missing children’s posters to draw scrutiny to Central American children who died while incarcerated in ICE detention centers, separated from their families under the Trump Administration’s “zero tolerance” border policy. The works, which were placed throughout cities in the United States, also examined the interplay between the policy and America’s for-profit prison industry.

The Roma actress and theater director Alina Serban (2018 Fellowship) broke new ground by staging her work, *The Great Shame*, the first play cast with predominantly Roma actors and directed by a Roma woman, on national stages

in Romania and in performance spaces across Europe. Along this journey, the Soros Arts Fellowship team helped Serban navigate censorship and discrimination and develop a public engagement program that discussed the modern-day fight to secure equal rights for the Roma people.

The fellows also created work that illuminated the possibilities of collective resistance. “We have to create a bigger, more inclusive, robust cultural narrative worldview that supplants the idea of authoritarianism as the answer,” said Starks. “We need to do better at actually showing that there is a bigger ‘we’.”

Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme’s *May Amnesia Never Kiss Us on the Mouth*, which pairs an archive of online recordings of everyday people singing and dancing in Palestine, Iraq, and Syria with commissioned performances, examines how communities bear witness to violence, loss, displacement, and forced migration.

Working with a crew of celebrated local artists, Guy Regis Jr. transformed Port-Au-Prince’s public spaces—from highly trafficked intersections to working-class neighborhoods—into a living canvas to protest and resist acts of everyday violence, from child abuse to sexual assault.

Fellow Spotlight

HASSAN DARSI

2018 Fellowship

Morocco



My Village, My Life

As with much of the life-based, unclassifiable work he’s made over his 30-year career, the project Hassan Darsi proposed for his Soros Arts Fellowship grew out of what he called a “site and a situation.”

In this case, the site was Beni Aïssi, the village outside Casablanca where he has made his home for over a decade. The situation was the arrival of a quarry project that threatened the livelihood and future of his neighbors, generations of whom have made their living as livestock and dairy farmers. Also endangered

was the health of the surrounding cork oak forest that has been steadily degraded over the years by extractive multinational corporations.

It was the villagers themselves who approached Darsi first for help after their own protests to local authorities proved unsuccessful. They recognized him as the artist behind the revitalization of a long-neglected urban park in Casablanca some years ago.

Darsi spent months deliberating a course of action. The project that emerged, *Karyati Hayati (My Village, My Life)*, sprang from Darsi's idea for the village to unite behind an economic alternative of their own to the quarry: the creation of an agro-ecological village that would double as an act of resistance that would help stake their claim on the land.

With Darsi as its "activator," the project would ultimately encompass a farming operation that exported produce to Casablanca; an exhibition of family portraits Darsi took of his neighbors paired with talks by the villagers themselves; a protest march and public walking tours in Beni Aïssi to draw attention to the unfolding situation; a film that documented the entire experience, and a public seminar that drew writers, architects, and scholars from around the world. The actions were both global (petitions signed by people in 72 countries) as well as hyperlocal: Darsi rallied villagers to hang homemade signs on their doors in a united show of protest against the quarry.

In 2019, their resistance paid off: local authorities halted the quarry project. Darsi and his neighbors had won their fight against the privatization of natural resources and used their own hands to build a thriving, green enterprise in its place.

For Darsi, the project brought to life his belief that art and life are inseparable. He views the protest march as a "collective performance." Selling vegetables in Casablanca with friends is an example of connection through art. The gardens themselves were works of intentional design. "Where does art end? Where does it begin? Who can say?"

Art at the Scale of Life

As an artist who typically works alone without a significant budget or a team of assistants, Darsi said the fellowship allowed him to more comfortably resource and manage this complex, ambitious project involving many collaborators. For the artist, this project, and his work in general, is not about achieving production at a massive scale. "It's about maintaining the desire, the flame for doing, participating, contributing," Darsi said.

"Because I try to do it the right way, at scale: How does one live at scale, work at scale, eat at scale, grow produce at scale, out of respect for life, the planet, but also to be effective?" Darsi asked. "Everyone knows that the future means people coming together, all over the world. There should not be one part of the world, or a single plot of land, where we could have miracles and not in others. We ought to have miracles everywhere."



Hassan Darsi stands with local residents and farmers as part of an action of resistance against a quarry project in Beni Aïssi, Morocco, on October 13, 2018.

Photo courtesy of Hassan Darsi

“They Make Things Grow”

Today the gardens are a bright spot of economic renewal in Beni Aïssi and the broader Benslimane region where the unemployment rate has historically been higher than the national average. The village has become something of an eco-destination. Many visitors to the forest stop in at the village to dine at the dozen-plus family restaurants that have opened in the past few years. The influx of wealth has meant that families “no longer have to say to their kids, ‘You have to work.’ No, no, now there’s school,” Darsi said.

“For years in Morocco they’ve been talking about models for growth, at country-scale. No growth model has worked in the entire life of the government. So, our tiny village is now an extremely good model of development for Morocco,” he said. “People with their tiny plot of land, with their hands, their competence, their livestock, their children: they make things grow. They make something of their lives, they benefit from it. Imagine if we could actually push this model beyond Beni Aïssi.”

What We're Learning

Four years into administering the fellowship program, we offer these insights and findings:

1. **Centering the artist's vision leads to enterprise and change.**

The Open Society Foundations' Culture and Art program has long funded arts institutions and organizations. The Soros Arts Fellowship was created to recognize the artist as a singular and audacious force for change. As Chinua Achebe wrote, "One of the truest tests of integrity is its blunt refusal to be compromised." Independent artists embody the spirit and ethos of individual freedom that have been at the core of the Foundations from the beginning.

Activating the fullness of their powers means granting artists freedom, time, space, and encouragement to invent new modes of truth-telling and new forms of emancipation. Socially engaged artists, in particular, are testing methods, strategies, and approaches to solving social issues to create lasting change.

"Risk taking is connected to creating groundbreaking ideas," said Wiles. "You can't do that without taking a risk. Artists are, at their core, very vulnerable. They're not afraid. No great idea or change in the world has come from being fearful. It only comes from being fearless."

Their work is more urgent today than ever: nationalist, authoritarian governments and other aligned forces are weaponizing the power of arts and culture to generate dominant narratives that help them consolidate power, silence dissent, and weaken the health of liberal democracies.

Action Steps:

- Select artists with care. Make sure they are mission-aligned and have a track record of executing projects that are authentically rooted, responsive to the community, and have a clear and compelling vision of impact.
- Give them the tools to succeed. Back up your trust with unrestricted funding and practical counsel that centers their needs.
- Be willing to risk failure. Not all the Soros Arts Fellowship projects succeeded. This happened for a number of reasons: the complexity involved, limited resources, or factors beyond the artist's control. In these instances, the Soros Arts Fellowship team worked with fellows to pivot or recalibrate the goals and scope of the project. Depending on need, we've also provided emergency funds or extended grant deadlines.

2. Agility and rapid responsiveness are necessary for this work.

Supporting artists and cultural producers who work in public spaces and in politically unstable or environmentally threatened regions of the world requires a willingness to react to shifting currents and pressures that can put an artist at risk or force a project off course. A number of our fellows, including Faustin Linyekula in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Guy Regis Jr. were forced to suspend their projects at certain junctures due to volatility in their respective regions. It is worth noting that their knowledge of the local political terrain made their projects possible to begin with, under conditions they navigated with nuance and skill.

While human rights organizations and funders provide resources such as emergency funding, legal aid, and relocation assistance to human rights defenders, artists who put themselves on the line are typically not included. Meanwhile, arts funders institutions have historically not been equipped to respond to these contingencies. Artists are falling between the cracks.

“Philanthropy does not always consider the psychic and emotional toll that artists and creative activists face when leading socially engaged work, particularly in intense sociopolitical contexts. The weight of their experience is often missed on those stewarding resources, as it is difficult to grasp hold of what it truly means for an artist to be involved

in political and social movements and revolutions and witness defeat. That defeat is painful, and sometimes silencing,” said Mouarbes. Socially engaged artists, particularly those working in conflict zones and under political duress “need to have spaces of care, of trust, people rallying behind them and supporting them, nurturing them. Something we’ve very intentionally done is to create and hold space for fellows to be seen, and for their practices to be valued.”

Action Steps:

- Be prepared to offer rapid-response support (and to provide maximum flexibility with grants and other resources). The Soros Arts Fellowship team was able to provide stipends during COVID-19 and to jump in with individualized support—including crisis communications—at critical moments to assist fellows dealing with unexpected hardship or targeted attacks. Many of the 2020 fellows’ projects were extended into 2022 due to pandemic delays.
- Revisit grant-making themes every so often to evolve with strategic priorities. The Culture and Art program refreshes its themes for the Soros Arts Fellowship after every two 18-month cycles in alignment with an area of cross-cutting open society significance, which also helps broaden and diversify the pool of nominees.

3. Innovation and breakthroughs at the local level must be connected and amplified for global influence.

Some of the most politically vital and radically inspiring art today is being made in the Global South and in communities where artists have been historically under-resourced and their work underseen. As the fates of the world's people become increasingly intertwined through technology, the climate crisis, and authoritarian threat, we must do more to knit together local efforts on the ground that are pointing the way to global solutions.

Action Steps:

- Focus support to regions on the frontlines of political and environmental crises—particularly in the Global South, where resources, infrastructure, and access to opportunities are fewer for artists and cultural producers—and to the efforts of artists rooted in their communities who are leading the way.
- Invest in a clear public relations and marketing strategies for each artist. This is critical to catapult their work to the level of visibility and legitimacy necessary to elevate their career and achieve traction on the social problems they are working to solve.
- Invest in support for storytelling, strategic communications, and marketing strategies for artists to

ensure that their work and impact is being captured and communicated with broader audiences.

4. Artists must be engaged more as partners in social movements.

Challenging power isn't enough. We need to inspire change, build a just world, and hold ground against backlash and attack. Artists have the power to break through to new and broader audiences, invigorate those in the trenches, and reveal intersections between shared struggles. Soros Arts Fellows are part of a long lineage of artist-activists who have used their artistry and platforms to champion causes and condemn injustice. These include the post-revolution muralist movement led by artists like Diego Rivera and Jose Clement Orozco that celebrates Mexico's pre-colonial history and Indigenous culture; singer-songwriter Miriam Makeba's crusade to abolish Apartheid in South Africa; and the eruption of protest art during Sudan's 2019 revolution, from the murals of Galal Yousif to the visual (and viral) works of resistance by diasporic artists such as Khalid Albaih.

"Art and freedom of expression were at the forefront of our fight to overthrow a dictator," Albaih has written. "Artists are still doing all they can with what they have to ensure that Sudan's burst of collective artistic expression helps Sudan reach democracy."³

3 ["It is time to support Sudan's artists in their fight for democracy" | *The Art Newspaper*](#)

Action Steps:

- Help bridge the gap between changemakers and socially engaged artists by making legible the ways arts can contribute profoundly and dynamically to achieve movement goals.
- Broker connections. Solidarity and collaboration grow out of authentic relationships of trust and a deeper understanding of shared affinities and motivations.
- Create opportunities that encourage collaboration between artists and the broader constellation of changemakers through grants and convenings.
- Support and protect socially engaged artists as human rights defenders in their own right. Artists with social practices, like activists, are at risk of being targeted by police and legal persecution and deserve protection under the international human rights framework.

5. Socially engaged artists and cultural producers are hungry for allyship.

Virtually every fellow who has been part of the program has expressed how much they valued the rare opportunity to break bread with kindred artists and their desire to keep dialoguing. For some, meeting their cohort was the first time they'd ever interacted with other socially engaged artists and cultural producers. As important as it is to connect artists with other changemakers, building allyship among artists should remain a priority for sustenance, knowledge-sharing, and courage.

Action Steps:

- Organize in-person artist convenings. Funders, in particular, are well-positioned to foster community building among artists and harness their collective power for change. These gatherings are especially important given that artists tend to work independently.
- Leverage virtual meeting platforms more. During the pandemic, the Soros Arts Fellowship program, like many worldwide, turned to virtual platforms for cohort convenings. While virtual meetings can't substitute for in-person gatherings, they are now essential, and will likely become more so in the future to mitigate against carbon emissions.
- Invest in regional convenings. Organize gatherings for artists, cultural producers, and other changemakers who live in relative proximity to each other to build stronger regional ties around shared concerns and ideas.

Fellow Spotlight

PALOMA MCGREGOR

2020 Fellowship

St. Croix



A Call and Response

For Paloma McGregor, the news that she'd been nominated as Soros Arts Fellowship recipient arrived at an inflection point in her life. She had recently resigned as the head of an arts organization, unable to resolve internal issues at odds with her vision and values.

The nomination bolstered her resolve to leave the constraints—and security—of an institution and to fully reclaim her practice as an independent artist. “The nomination was a completely unexpected affirmation of that choice and really set me on a trajectory,”

said McGregor, a choreographer and performer whose work centers Black voices through collaborative, process-based artmaking and organizing.

That trajectory was to explore what she describes as a “call and response between colony and mainland”—her birthplace, St. Croix, and her current home in New York City. Her fellowship project was an extension of a longer performance work she began in 2011 animated by these three questions: What do you take with you? Leave behind? Return to reclaim?

Her plan was to travel to St. Croix and walk from her family's ancestral land in Christiansted to Gallows Bay, where her father used to build fish traps, and see where the experience led her. But the pandemic made travel impossible. McGregor spent six months grieving and emerged determined to re-engage her practice from a different angle.

She began hosting a monthly virtual study group of a dozen artists and cultural workers around the topic of disaster capitalism and what happens when people are displaced and private developers move in. McGregor invited guest speakers, using a portion of her fellowship funds for honorariums. "It was really helpful to be able to resource people for showing up," said McGregor.

While the Zoom convenings were a necessity during lockdown, McGregor was buoyed by the intellectual and creative energy generated online, from book discussions to the short videos each study group member agreed to make. For McGregor, who had never before made a film, the kineticism between her disciplines—dance and filmmaking—emerged with greater clarity: both are visual art forms activated by movement, space, and duration.

A'we deh ya (All of Us Are Here)

In late 2020, McGregor was able to travel to St. Croix where she spent several months walking from the home where she was staying to the beach along a road covered by a canopy of old mahogany trees and flanked by sugar cane fields that had been planted by a white resident from the United States mainland. She knew that this area on the west end of the island had a long history of resistance movements, including the notorious "Fire Burn," a 1878 worker uprising against plantation owners led by four Black women in which 100 people were killed and 900 acres of sugar were destroyed.

McGregor felt an urgent pull that "something wanted to be made" from this complex natural landscape of ancient trees and the cane fields that harkened to an era that her people had fought repeatedly to move past. By the end of her trip, she had conceived and directed a short film, *A'we deh ya (All of Us Are Here)*. The film documents McGregor and two other Black female performers dancing in the cane fields as an act of resistance and liberation. For the artist, the film was an "instigation" that provoked the question: What can the body or the spirit imbue in a space that has historical or present trauma?



Still image from the 2022 film *A'we deh ya (All of Us Are Here)*, Paloma McGregor, director and performer (center).

Building Solidarity Across Borders

Last May, after her father passed, McGregor inherited a small piece of land, which has had her reflecting on conversations she's had with herself and with her "thought partners" on the Soros Arts Fellowship team who have encouraged and emboldened her ideas.

A fourth animating question has emerged from the three she originally posed: What do you bring back home with you? Specifically, how can she contribute to the cultural revitalization of her homeland? Can an old movie theater be transformed into a hurricane shelter and performance space? Can a stay at a vacation home rental be combined with lessons in Crucian history?

McGregor has been thinking a lot about strengthening "collaborative muscles" between people in the mainland and in St. Croix who share a commitment to protecting cultural legacies, and how this can be a starting point toward a longer trajectory of

building resources together. To move forward from this starting point, and to expand upon the success of her earlier study groups, she plans to convene "culture bearers and educators" through a new in-person study group in St. Croix.

"There is such a range of value around what we're fighting for, and that is significant. Because I think all these things are connected. And the more connected we can see the intersections in the work, as well as the distinctions... the more prepared we will be for whatever unfolds."

Paloma McGregor

Fellow Spotlight

AMANDA ABI KHALIL

2019 Fellowship

Lebanon



A Safe Space

Months into her Soros Arts Fellowship, the independent curator Amanda Abi Khalil lost her life’s savings in the Lebanese financial collapse. Soon after, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, followed by the massive explosion in the Port of Beirut that left more than 200 people dead and another 300,000 homeless. Amid this onslaught of tragedy, Abi Khalil said the fellowship provided a “safe space” for her to mourn, to fight for her own financial survival, and to marshal her energy and resources on behalf of other artists dispossessed by the blast and COVID-19.

Initially, the fellowship offered an opportunity to pause her teaching and writing work and spend more time on a curatorial passion project: an international exchange between Brazil and the Arab World, including exhibitions, public art commissions, and residencies, that explored notions of guest/host relations and the tensions of hospitality and hostility that surround politics of migration. Then came the liquidation of Lebanon’s banks.

“I didn’t have cash to buy a banana,” Abi Khalil recalled. After a year, and with the help of an attorney retained by the Open Society Foundations, she was able to recuperate some of her fellowship funding. “I felt saved,” she said.

Abi Khalil dedicated a portion of these funds to aid artists in her home country who had been devastated by the financial collapse, COVID-19, and the explosion by establishing an emergency arts residency in Brazil. With Lebanon’s creative community drowning in lost commissions and financial ruin, Abi Khalil activated Temporary Art Platform (TAP), the curatorial platform she founded to support social practice artists and projects, and to inspire hope. In 2021, TAP organized a 10-day program that invited artists, poets, workers, and activists to study ecology and collective placemaking in the times of extreme crisis on the site of an urban forest along the Beirut River. Throwing herself into this work, Abi Khalil said, was her only way of responding to the multiple crises facing people in Lebanon.

Because TAP operates without a permanent physical space, it received very little relief funding from funders, which prioritized art institutions that had sustained physical damage from the 2020 blast. And yet it was grassroots organizations like TAP that were able to stay active during COVID-19, curating and commissioning new work and hosting events because they were not rooted to a physical institution, most of which had temporarily shut down their operations, Abi Khalil said.

Survival and Stability

Looking back, Abi Khalil was grateful for the frank and open conversations she was able to have with members of the Soros Arts Fellowship team during, and even after, her fellowship term. “Of course, the money is super important, but these conversations were so, so much of this fellowship. There was a lot of listening, and that is so precious.”

Abi Khalil also received practical counsel aimed at bolstering her long-term stability as a curator. Abi Khalil credited the Soros Arts Fellowship team for advising her on establishing TAP’s nonprofit status in France. “It was lengthy and very bureaucratic, but it was the best decision. Now we have a bank account in Europe, which makes all these transfers, payments so much more straightforward and easier.”

“The Open Society support has been amazing because it stretched my practice as an independent [curator] for a longer time by scaling it up,” Khalil said. “I was able to do things more internationally with a sense of safety and security and the [backing] of a foundation and interlocutors who were concerned and interested in the struggles I was facing, and who were interested in taking part in these reforms I wanted, and I still want, in the art world.”



A view of the exhibition *A Casa é Sua / Make Yourself at Home, Displaced Ideas on Migration and Hos(ti)pitality*, curated by Amanda Abi Khalil in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2022.

© Rafael Adorjan for Amanda Abi Khalil

Better Treatment of Artists

With its focus on socially engaged art practices far away from the world of international art fairs and blue-chip galleries, TAP has always operated “on a different wavelength,” guided by Abi Khalil’s desire to reform practices within the art world such as better compensation and treatment of artists. “We need to make sure that when we work with artists, we are sustaining their practice as a whole,” said Abi Khalil. “They need support that is not only financial but a safe space to be able to express themselves.”

More recently, TAP has launched projects in France and collaborated with Columbia University on a series of art commissions in Beirut. In 2022, Abi Khalil was finally able to mount her curated show about hospitality in Rio de Janeiro.

“What keeps me going is a profound, profound, profound belief in the strength and impact of arts and culture,” said Abi Khalil, who compared art’s effects to skipping a stone across the surface of an ocean. “Sometimes it doesn’t work, but when it does, it’s beautiful. And you’re like, ‘Wow, the beauty of that!’ And the expectation and hope that, when you do things with the right spirit, with the right engagement, with the right energy, it actually ricochets. It gives me a lot of hope.”

Soros Arts Fellowship: Now and Into the Future



Drawing on the lessons we've learned, the Soros Arts Fellowship team is implementing a number of strategic shifts and new initiatives for greater impact:

Deeper integration: We're using the 2023 fellowship as a pilot for integrating the thematic and programmatic framework of one of the Open Society Foundations' core focus areas: climate justice and climate resilience work. How can this integrated focus enrich our understanding of how artists and cultural producers impact climate, environmental, and land justice? How can lifting up frontline communities most affected by global warming strengthen and otherwise influence climate justice movements?

Working closely with colleagues from the Open Society Foundations' Climate Justice program, Culture and Art has committed \$1.2M in grants to arts and culture organizations primarily in the Global South that are working on climate, environmental, and land justice, strengthening the fellowship, and vice versa, with these companion investments in the field.

Field research: Our team has been researching and engaging with leading organizations worldwide that are harnessing the power and capacity of arts and culture to implement solutions to climate and environmental justice issues with a community-oriented approach. Aligned with the fellowship framework, we propose building a portfolio of organizational grants that amplify the impact of artists' projects.

More gatherings, greater visibility: We are increasing our commitment to organizing convenings, forums, and public programs to accompany the fellowship grants to bring greater visibility to fellows' work. In 2024, our plan is to hold a forum on art, culture, and climate with a field partner to gain a deeper understanding of how art can be used to combat global warming and explore new and creative tactics that anticipate and respond to the realities of the climate crisis.

The greatest threat to authoritarianism has been and remains the robust exchange of ideas, debated freely. In regions of the world where open society is under threat and citizens are increasingly policed, persecuted, and silenced, the role of artists and cultural producers is more essential than ever. Artists are the voices of conscience and reason, the beacon of the collective political imagination. When we look back at catastrophes throughout history, cultural production remains one of the most salient lenses and modes of critique. "Culture sets the floor for political and social possibilities," said Starks.

As we look forward, visionary artists are testing restorative methodologies and implementing solutions that can be models for transforming communities worldwide. We need artists to help us take stock and respond creatively to the historical moment, in solidarity with the communities most marginalized and at risk.

The test of a truly open society is the vibrancy, equity, and inclusivity of its culture. The more we can do to ensure that artists and other culture makers are connected, supported, and protected, the more freedom and capacity they will have to build new futures, make hope tangible, and ignite the momentum necessary to take on the challenges ahead.

Through their work, artists strengthen the intersectional and interdisciplinary vitality of social and political movements—and often remind us of how much unites rather than divides us. "Whether you are in a favela in Brazil or El Barrio in the South Bronx, there are connecting issues that touch on what makes us, at the core, human," said Wiles.

FELLOWS

2018 Soros Arts Fellows: Art, Closing Space, and Public Space

- Khalid Albaih (Sudan/Norway)
- Hassan Darsi (Morocco)
- Laila Hida (Morocco)
- Faustin Linyekula (Democratic Republic of the Congo)
- Nana Oforiatta-Ayim (Ghana)
- Guy Regis Jr. (Haiti)
- Laurie Jo Reynolds (United States)
- Alina Serban (Romania)

2019 Soros Arts Fellows: Migration and Public Space

- Amanda Abi Khalil (Brazil/Lebanon)
- Firelei Báez (United States)
- Tania El Khoury (Lebanon)
- Regina José Galindo (Guatemala)
- Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera (United States)
- Bouchra Khalili (France/Germany)
- Guadalupe Maravilla (United States)
- Tinashe Mushakavanhu and Nontsikelelo Mutiti (Zimbabwe/United States)
- Kaneza Schaal (Rwanda)

2020 Soros Arts Fellows: Art, Migration, and Public Space: Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Decolonization

Note: This fellowship cycle was extended into 2022 due to the pandemic.

- Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme (Palestine/United States)
- Abullah Alkafri (Syria/Lebanon)
- Deborah Anzinger (Jamaica)
- Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit and Unangax̂/United States)
- Rachèle Magloire (Haiti)
- Paloma McGregor (St. Croix)
- Meleko Mokgosi (Botswana/United States)
- Olu Oguibe (United States)
- Tiago Sant'Ana (Brazil)

2023 Soros Arts Fellows: Art, Land, and Public Memory

- **Martha Atienza** (Philippines) will organize collaborative artworks and actions with fisherfolk and farmer communities on Bantayan Island and its group of islets in the Philippines for *Tigpanalipod (The Protectors)* to raise awareness around environmental justice, displacement, and cultural erasure.
- **Bilia Bah** (Guinea) will produce a collaborative and participatory theater production to launch public dialogue around climate change, urbanization, and the impacts of unregulated water drilling across Conakry, Guinea.
- **Yto Barrada** (Morocco) will expand botanical literacy to disseminate radical ways of making and thinking with *The Mothership Manifesto*, a collaborative, multidisciplinary, transgenerational and educational textile project at The Mothership, an eco-feminist residency, garden, and studio in Tangier, Morocco.
- **Omar Berrada** (Morocco/North Africa) will examine anti-Black racism in North Africa and propose poetic re-articulations of Moroccan identity, reclaiming marginalized narratives and invoking histories of pan-African solidarity.
- **Carolina Caycedo** (Colombia/Latin America/United States) will produce *We Place Life at the Center—Situamos la vida al centro*, bringing together ancestral and embodied approaches to the natural world as alternatives to the global climate crisis, grounded in field research and engagement with Natives, campesino/peasant communities, and climate activists throughout the Americas.
- **Sari Dennise** (Mexico) will organize *Almárcigo*, a collaborative, multidisciplinary, and archival project with communities in Xochimilco, Mexico, to preserve and articulate water-related knowledge and practices and promote shared learning around alternative ways of being with the environment.
- **Fehras Publishing Practices—Kenan Darwich and Sami Rustom** (Lebanon/Germany) will create *Hader Halal (With Regard to Presence)* a multiformat project that aims to reclaim forgotten collective memory in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa region and rewrite narratives of modern Arab history from a queer, migrant, and feminist perspective.
- **Deborah Jack** (St. Maarten) will create *To Make a Map of My Memory: Wayfinding Along Synaptic Topographies*, linking cultural memory preservation in St. Maarten with climate justice through an archive of oral histories, a connected film, and a multimedia installation.
- **Cannupa Hanska Luger** (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota Tribes/United States) will create a publication and series of films centered on Indigenous knowledge and survival practices in relation to land, climate, and the environment. He will boldly assert that Indigenous technologies are critical to sustaining life and humanity on this planet.

- **Mónica de Miranda** (Portugal) will work with African migrant communities in Lisbon to document stories of migration and land ecologies for *Where Cities Are Invisible, Gardens Grow*, bringing together artists, activists, and ecologists to reimagine more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable public spaces.
- **Molemo Moiloa** (South Africa) will produce a series of art and community engaged works under the framework of the “house of ungovernability,” an informal center for sharing and codeveloping tactics for sustaining in times of uncertainty, rooted in our relationships to the land.
- **Dalton Paula** (Brazil) will organize *Quilombo-Escola*, an arts and education project that supports Afro-Brazilian artists through artistic residencies and training, and fosters community collaboration and exchanges with art, the environment, and ancestral and traditional knowledge rooted in a Quilombo perspective across Brazil.
- **Chemi Rosado-Seijo** (Puerto Rico) will work with residents to transform El Cerro, Puerto Rico, a marginalized community that sits on the frontlines of the climate crisis, into a “Green Barriada,” a self-sustaining and environmentally resilient community. He will work collaboratively with El Cerro residents to develop and implement community-led solutions for climate change and environmental and economic justice.
- **Rijin Sahakian** (Iraq/United States) will trace the legacies of war-making on the physical, cultural, and psychic landscapes between Iraq and America, centering the Iraqi experience. United States-led coalition violence in Iraq was presented with impunity to the global public on an unprecedented scale, shifting conditions for living internationally and generationally.
- **Nida Sinnokrot** (Palestine) will produce *Storytelling Stones: How Far Does Your Mother’s Voice Carry?*, a series of collaborative and site-specific sculptures that uplift Indigenous practices and reclaim cultural memory, expand discourse and action on environmental justice, and activate public spaces in ways that are resonant and impactful for Palestinian and Indigenous communities globally.
- **Jordan Weber** (United States) will organize a regenerative ecologies project in East Detroit that will revitalize a square acre of forest as an air remediation zone, a trauma informed community center, an open-air environmental justice classroom, and a site for conifer tree transplants to counter the harmful effects of pollution from nearby automobile plants.
- **Ixchel Tonāntzin Xōchitzihuatl** (Ecuador) (formerly Christina Maria Patiño Houle) will organize *We the Trees*, a multitribal initiative for land reclamation and culture stewardship in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

Soros Arts Fellowship (2018-2023): By the Numbers

47	32	\$4,443,000*
fellows as of 2023	countries represented	awarded to date

*Includes all fellowship cohorts and COVID-19 emergency stipends.