



Artist Reflections on 3Arts Support *(and what they have us thinking about)*



*“It feels like I’m part of a family of
profoundly gifted artists.
Like the Chicago artist version of X-Men.”*

3arts.org

© 3Arts, Inc. March 2020

Images: 2014-2017 3Arts Awardees. Robin Subar Photography.

“There is **a new level of credibility** to my art having the 3Arts name behind it.”

*

“Being a 3Arts awardee is an incredible honor and has remained **one of the most important moments in my creative career.**”

*

“Validation, continued career support, and a sign that my work is **valued in the city of Chicago.**”

*

“The organization has **helped me imagine a career for myself** as a creator in ways I didn't think were possible.”

*

“**Receiving the award is just the beginning. 3Arts is with you every step of the way.**”

*

“To receive such a prestigious award was not only a confirmation that I was on the right track, but 3Arts gave me actual financial independence. This gave me **space to just be creative without any limitations.**”



Image: **Ayako Kato**, 2016 3Arts/Reva & David Logan Foundation Awardee.
Photo by William Frederking, 2018.

OUR MISSION

Founded in 1912, with a history centered on women artists, 3Arts is a nonprofit organization that supports artists working in the performing, teaching, and visual arts in the Chicago metropolitan area, including women artists, artists of color, and Deaf and disabled artists. By providing unrestricted awards, project funding, residencies, professional development, and promotion, 3Arts helps artists take risks, experiment, and build momentum in their careers over time.

Since 2007, 3Arts has supported 1,000 artists across all program areas, including 70% women-identified artists, 70% artists of color, and 10% deaf and disabled artists working in the six-county metropolitan area, and distributed \$3.8 million through our grantmaking. In the past three years (2017-2019), 3Arts has supported artists living in 68 zip codes: 43 within the city limits, 18 in other Cook County neighborhoods, and seven in surrounding counties (Lake, DuPage, and Will).

THE 3ARTS AWARD

Since 2008, we have been supporting Chicago artists with unrestricted cash grants, or **3Arts Awards**, on an annual basis. In the first six years of the program, our awards were \$15,000 each. In 2014, we increased the award to \$25,000. The number of annual awards has varied from six to twelve, before settling at ten per year beginning in 2012. Our awards are unrestricted, no-strings-attached, cash grants. Artists may use them to defray expenses, pay off debt, purchase equipment, and focus on their creative process—or in any way they see fit.

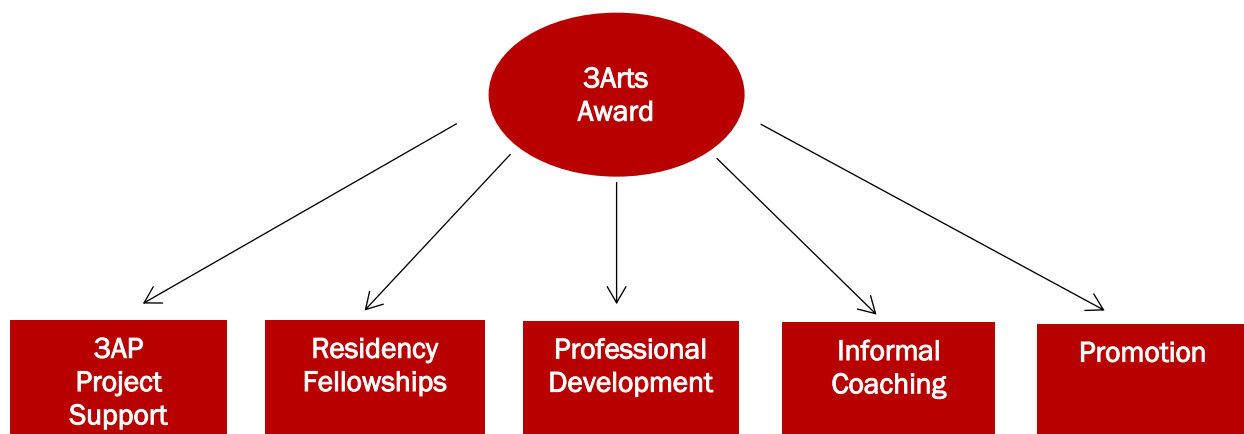
Selection Process

Awardees are selected through a nomination and jury process. Approximately 100 artists are nominated each year by 35 new anonymous nominators. The nominators themselves are Chicago-based artists, arts advocates, curators, and presenters who are acutely knowledgeable about artists working in a wide variety of communities in the greater metropolitan area.

Once nominated, artists are invited to submit applications to be considered for an award. Five discipline-specific jury panels review the applications and select the award recipients. Each jury panel consists of one local and two out-of-state judges who convene in Chicago to select two awardees in each discipline: dance, music, teaching arts, theater, and visual arts.

More Than Cash

An unrestricted cash grant is significant on its own, but our awards offer more than that. They are the entry point to an array of career-spanning support streams designed to help artists build momentum. Once artists receive 3Arts Awards, they become eligible for project support (3Arts Projects, or 3AP), residency fellowships, professional development, informal coaching, and promotion.



REFLECTIONS FROM ARTISTS

For this report, we invited 40 artists who received a \$25,000 3Arts Award from 2014 to 2017 to tell us about their experiences.

As part of our annual data collection efforts, we survey awardees one year after they receive the award, which provides us with timely reflections on how the funds were used and other aspects of our support. While the annual surveys are always useful, we want to explore the long-term effects in order to gauge our impact over time. In 2016 we shared a similar report with feedback from artists who received our award during 2008 to 2016.

What we wanted to know:

- Has 3Arts support made a difference in artists' lives?
- Has it led to creative and professional leaps?
- Does this award make artists feel more connected to Chicago?

The feedback we received from artists went deeper than we anticipated. Artists told us about the impact of the award on them personally, in their careers, and in their artistic practices.

These reflections help us understand *how and why* this kind of support can have an indelible impact on the livelihoods of artists, particularly women artists, artists of color, and deaf and disabled artists. While we've included quotations from artists in this report, we've omitted direct attributions so as to preserve their anonymity.

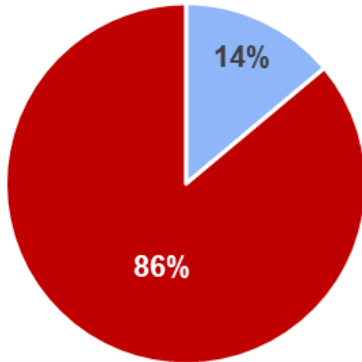
It is equally important for us to learn from this process what we can be doing better in order to amplify our support for artists and be responsive to the evolving conditions under which they live and work. [Please see page 12 for what we're thinking about for the future.](#)



Images left to right: **Fawzia Mirza** (2015 3Arts Community Awardee) by Robin Subar; **Kris Lenzo** (2015 3Arts/David Pinkerton Awardee) performing (left), photo courtesy of MOMENTA; **Candace Hunter** (2016 3Arts/Chandler Family Awardee) with her work installed at the Hyde Park Art Center.

WHAT DID THE CASH MEAN?

86% of artists said the \$25,000 grant had a **long-term impact on their financial situation**. For this cohort of surveyed artists, the length of time since receiving the award ranged from two to five years.



"The cash was an immense help to me. I situated almost all of it within my creative practice. It allowed me to do something that I often don't consider: pay myself for the time I spent in the creative process."

*

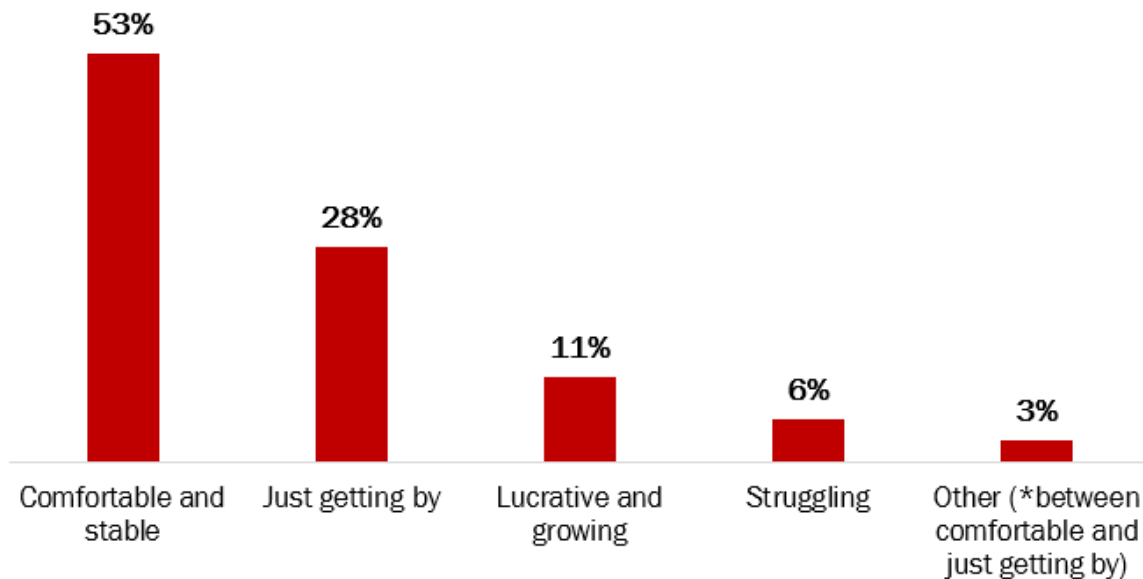
"The financial support was tremendously helpful. It's made the daily grind brighter, and lighter, and has made my goals that much more attainable."

*

"The timing was crucial. I received the 3Arts Award five years after leaving my full-time teaching job. There was definitely a dip financially where I almost lost my house. So the money was right on time and then it seemed, as a result, I was able to secure other funding and since then I have been building and repairing my debt and playing music more than ever. It definitely brought a peace of mind to my life."

We invited the artists to choose a description for their current financial situation. For most artists the award provided stability or alleviated significant debt. Some artists were able to take advantage of the moment (*"the timing was everything"*) to make a down payment on a mortgage or demonstrate institutional backing in order to secure a loan.

The award is not a "cure all" however, with many artists continuing to navigate the challenges of freelance work, fluctuating finances, and the demands of sustaining investments they made in their careers over the longer term.

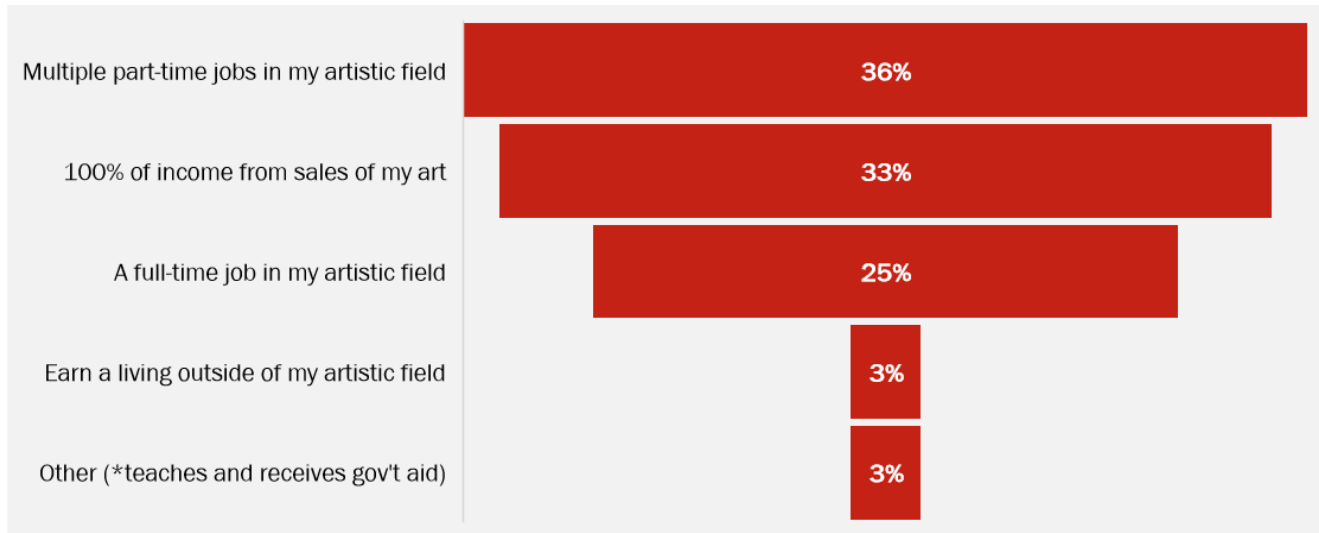


ARTISTIC LIVELIHOODS

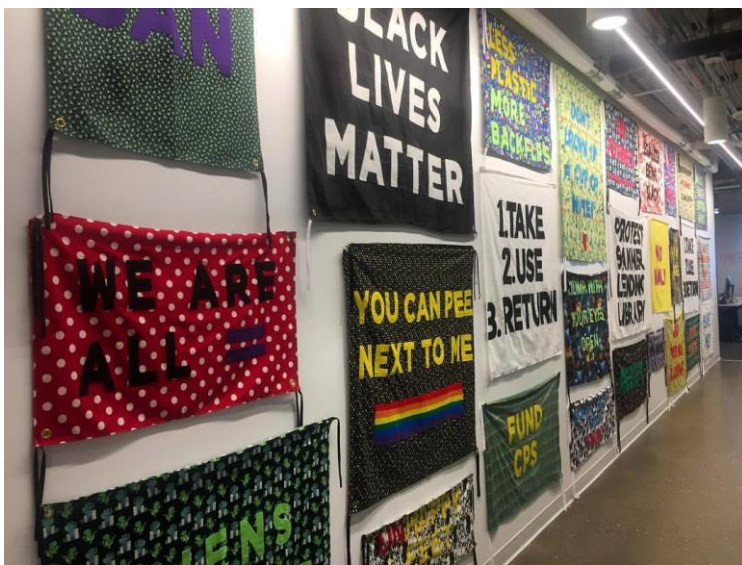
64% of artists earn income as teachers, whether in an adjunct, part-time, or tenure-track position.

For many artists, teaching is a necessity because it can offer stability and access to institutional resources to further their practice. For some, it can be a barrier to being able to focus full-time on making art.

We invited artists to choose a description for how they make their living:



"I have been fortunate to have well-timed grants and sales in addition to good money management. It's a grind and stressful, but I am free from having to teach. It's nice to know it's an option, but I don't like the narrative that artists have to teach to remain financially stable. \$25k is an adjunct salary in many ways. It would be nice if artists could financially plan to transition to full-time from 3Arts if they want. Each situation is unique, but it would be great to figure that out."



"The financial aspect of the grant was being able to grow myself as an artist. Dancemaking is so much more than being in the studio. I was afforded the freedom to organize my brand as a choreographer. This included hiring a brand expert, website developer, and an assistant to help with the day-to-day emails, grant submissions, and anything else that requires support."

Image: Protest Banner Lending Library installation by Aram Han Sifuentes (2016 3Arts/Stan Lipkin & Evelyn Appell Lipkin Awardee)

“3Arts offers legitimacy and makes other larger grantors take notice. I often say my life hasn’t stopped being full speed since that night.”

*

“The 3Arts Award helped push my career forward. I used it as seed money to support my studio practice with space, equipment, and research-related travel. Since then, I have received many opportunities and leads as a direct result of my affiliation with this organization.”

*

“3Arts was a catalyst to helping me pursue my choreography career. This was crucial to me moving forward.”

*

“I have explored more opportunities for international collaborations, been bolder in my creative experimentation, stronger in judging new work, and gained confidence.”

*

“The award holds a lot of weight for people. I know having it on my résumé has probably helped to bolster my credibility as an artist.”



Images left to right: **Tomeka Reid** (2016 3Arts/Southwest Airlines Awardee) traveling in Egypt; **Ginger Lane** (2017 3Arts Community Awardee) performing (back) with Susan Ojala Myers (front) at *Counter Balance IX* by MOMENTA, photo by Lisa Green; **Brandi Berry Benson** (2014 3Arts/Gertrude E. Grisham Awardee) in the 3Arts office.

RECOGNITION, IN CHICAGO AND BEYOND

92% of artists said that receiving the 3Arts Award made them feel more valued in their community.



Images, clockwise from left: **Amanda Williams** (2014 3Arts/Stan Lipkin & Evelyn Appell Lipkin Awardee) speaking at the 2017 3Arts Awards Celebration, photo by Robin Subar; **Carlos Mejía** (2014 3Arts Awardee) sitting at his marimba; and **Benji Hart** (2015 3Arts/Irene Siragusa Phelps Awardee) presenting at the Teaching Artist Summit.

*"The 3Arts Award **legitimized my work** in ways that have validated me personally and opened up new opportunities, **but also really anchored me in Chicago**, which can be a hard place to be an artist. To feel seen and valued in a city that often marginalizes and harms Black, Brown, trans, and queer communities has **given me new reasons to stay**, and to have the support to create in a city where those opportunities can be particularly limited is crucial."*

*

*"The award has **given me new respect in both Chicago and beyond**. It is difficult and unfortunately uncommon for an indigenous person to be recognized with an award like this. The fact that I received it has been a great event for me and for the people of my community. Those who know me have acquired a new respect for the work I do, and this has opened doors to new opportunities. I am very grateful for this recognition."*

*

*"It felt incredible to be nominated, to be seen by someone else, and thought of as valuable. This was reinforced by the jury panel of highly-respected individuals and to have the award presented before such a diverse and respected Chicago audience. It really felt **rewarding in my heart's purpose and intention**."*

BOOSTING CREATIVITY AND CAREERS

100% of artists said that receiving a 3Arts Award *boosted their confidence*, 94% reported having experimented or *taken new strides creatively* since receiving a 3Arts Award, and 89% said they have *made notable gains* in their careers.

In many cases, the cash helped to remove obstacles such as lack of time, money, or studio space, enabling artists to invest in whatever they needed to make new work.

By far, artists talked about the award boosting confidence, opening doors, and enhancing credibility.

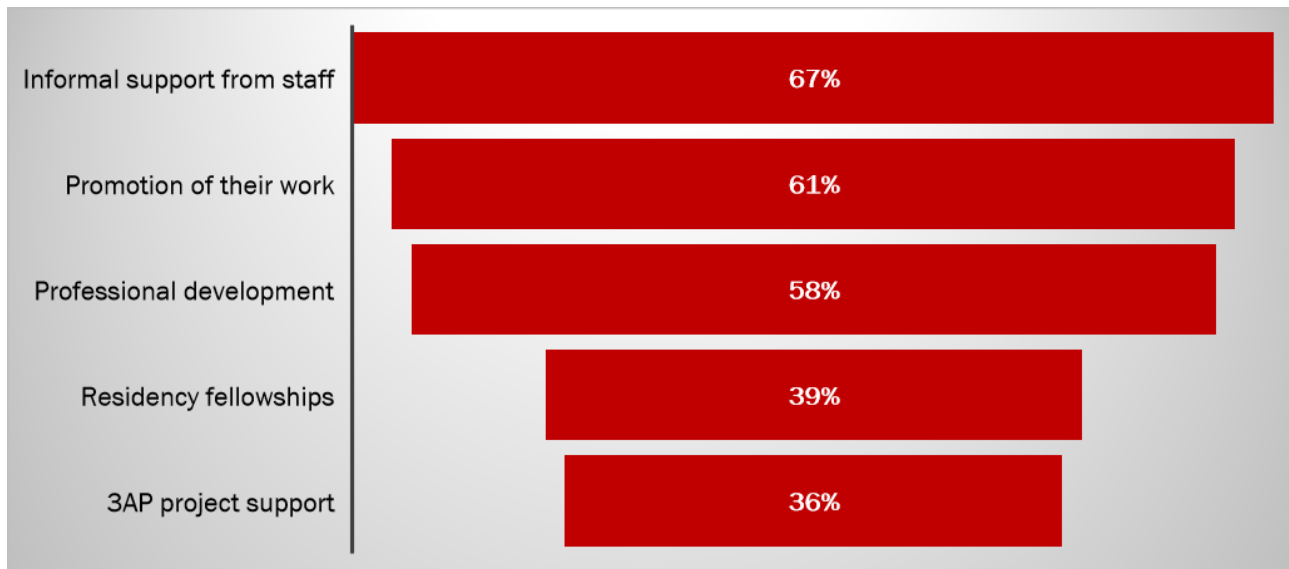


Images: 3Arts Awards Celebrations from 2014-2017 by Robin Subar Photography.

BEYOND THE MONEY

100% of artists said the fact that 3Arts offers other support streams beyond the cash grant—and continuing after their award year—makes a difference.

We asked artists to tell us which other 3Arts programs they have participated in and found useful. Artists who have not yet taken advantage said they hoped to do so in the future.



“It has all been incredibly valuable—the advice pertaining to activities such as crowdfunding, my upcoming residency, which I am anticipating with great excitement, and underlying it all, the knowledge that you are there for us, to consult or aid in any way, is such a rare and precious gift.”

*“Absolutely. I found grants that I didn’t know about and also got the wonderful opportunity to work on my solo work. **I would not be in the great place I am right now without 3Arts.**”*

*“YES! In many ways the professional development and informal feedback have been more impactful than the money: **invaluable insight at key moments** has been critical to my success.”*

***“It makes a difference.** 3Arts offers additional opportunities to support the working artist in the city, helps strengthen the 3Arts artist network, and it’s just lovely to have another avenue of support and acknowledgement.”*

*“It has **given me more confidence in my field, inspired me to work and push harder, and to take more risks.** It is so encouraging and extremely comforting to know that 3Arts is behind my back and will support me through my successes and failures.”*

A GROWING ARTIST COMMUNITY

One resounding comment from nearly every artist in this 2014-2017 cohort was the feeling of access to a “3Arts network,” a “family,” and a “community of artistic peers.”

“It’s about becoming part of a local family/network of artists producing in Chicagoland. I value those connections and the inspiration I get from watching other artists shine as I cut my own path. There are incredible opportunities to learn from our peers in this network that could eventually result overall in a stronger arts ecosystem for all of us to benefit from.”

*

“Getting to remain in the 3Arts family for life...and having continued opportunities; there is always information, learning, and support.”

*

“The 3Arts family and extended network has been an incredible resource...Aside from the recognition and legacy of incredible artists who have also been awarded (and will continue to be awarded), 3Arts maintains a reputation within Chicago’s creative community that is unparalleled. I am consistently in awe of the artists 3Arts awards and am always grateful to be affiliated as an awardee.”



Images, clockwise from left: **Jo Cattell** (2016 3Arts/Perkins Coie Awardee), **Maggie Popadiak** (2016 3Arts/Reva & David Logan Foundation Awardee), **Aram Han Sifuentes** (2016 3Arts/Stan Lipkin & Evelyn Appell Lipkin Awardee), photo by Robin Subar; **Esther Grisham Grimm** and **William Estrada** (2015 3Arts Community Awardee) at the 2018 Equity Summit; and **Samuel J. Roberson Jr.** (2014 3Arts/Siragusa Foundation Awardee), photo by Robin Subar.

OUR TURN TO REFLECT

In all that 3Arts does, we learn the most from the artists in our network. They help us ensure that our mission is relevant and needed. We look to them for feedback on ways we can continually be looking forward.

Here are a few things that the artists in this report have us thinking about:

- **Promotion matters.** It helps artists build audiences and recognition and sometimes receive additional funding. So we ask ourselves: beyond social media, e-newsletters, monthly artist updates to our network of supporters, YouTube, what more can we do? This year, we are trying something new by launching a Disability Culture Leadership Initiative that will include four videotaped conversations with disability-identified artists who have participated in our 3Arts Residency Fellowships at the University of Illinois at Chicago. This project seeks to document the “Chicago model” of disability aesthetics at this moment in time, increase the visibility of artists with disabilities, and advocate for disability culture to be centered in equity work.
- **Professional Development programs need to be as responsive as informal coaching.** It’s hard to do more with a small staff, so we need to be on top of the subjects that are most important to artists. In light of that, we are refining one of our offerings in 2020 to focus on “Project Mapping: From Concept to Funding.” This advanced workshop is designed to help artists develop big ideas into concrete plans and proposals. We hope this will equip artists to be even stronger candidates for other award or funding opportunities.
- **The limitations of a one-time award and the taxes paid on that award.** We are aware that a \$25,000 grant can amount to a \$20,000 grant after taxes. We are challenged now to increase our fundraising efforts to consider ways to increase the amount of our award.
- **Building relationships is the heart of the work.** As the numbers of award recipients increase each year, how do we retain the same level of care in our programmatic implementation? When we reach a tipping point, we may need to consider whether we have the resources to add a staff member.
- **The integrity of our organization makes a difference.** When we do our jobs well, the impact of the award is strengthened, whether that’s through prestigious national jury panels, a sold-out awards celebration, or a robust public relations strategy. Are there other ways we can increase the integrity and practices for our organization that will make our awards matter even more to artists?
- **Advocating equity.** Tracking demographics of awardees helps us know if we are reaching the artists we need to reach. Are we collecting the right information to know if that’s the case? Are we being transparent so that artists understand how and why that information may help 3Arts advocate for the change we want to propel?



Image: **Sophia Nahli Allison** (2014 3Arts/Southwest Airlines Awardee) on a 3Arts Residency Fellowship at the Camargo Foundation, Cassis, France in 2019.

3ARTS AWARDEES

2014	
<p>Sophia Nahli Allison <i>Teaching Arts</i> Southwest Airlines Awardee</p> 	<p>Brandi Berry Benson <i>Music</i> Gertrude E. Grisham Awardee</p> 
<p>Irena Botea Bucan <i>Visual Arts</i> Chandler Family Awardee</p> 	<p>Silvia Hernandez-DiStasi <i>Theater</i> Awardee</p> 
<p>Darrell Jones <i>Dance</i> Denise & Gary Gardner Awardee</p> 	<p>Carlos Mejía <i>Music</i> Awardee</p> 
<p>Erica Mott <i>Dance</i> McCormick Family Foundation Awardee</p> 	<p>Samuel G. Roberson Jr. <i>Teaching Arts</i> Siragusa Foundation Awardee</p> 
<p>Calamity West <i>Theater</i> Merrill Lynch Awardee</p> 	<p>Amanda Williams <i>Visual Arts</i> Stan Lipkin & Evelyn Appell Lipkin Awardee</p> 

3ARTS AWARDEES

2015	
<p>Allen Gilmore <i>Theater</i> Denise & Gary Gardner Awardee</p> 	<p>Benji Hart <i>Teaching Arts</i> Irene Siragusa Phelps Awardee</p> 
<p>Kris Lenzo <i>Dance</i> David Pinkerton Awardee</p> 	<p>Stephanie Martinez <i>Dance</i> RH, Restoration Hardware Awardee</p> 
<p>Fawzia Mirza <i>Theater</i> Community Awardee</p> 	<p>Cheryl Pope <i>Visual Arts</i> Stan Lipkin & Evelyn Appell Lipkin Awardee</p> 
<p>Chris Silva <i>Teaching Arts</i> Chandler Family Awardee</p> 	<p>Frank Wain <i>Music</i> Reva & David Logan Foundation Awardee</p> 
<p>Folayemi Wilson <i>Visual Arts</i> Allstate Awardee</p> 	<p>Chihstuan Yang <i>Music</i> Southwest Airlines Awardee</p> 

3ARTS AWARDEES

2016	
<p>Barak adé Soleil <i>Dance</i> Denise & Gary Gardner Awardee</p> 	<p>Jo Cattell <i>Theater</i> Perkins Coie Awardee</p> 
<p>Alexandria Eregbu <i>Teaching Arts</i> Allstate Awardee</p> 	<p>William Estrada <i>Teaching Arts</i> Community Awardee</p> 
<p>Jess Godwin <i>Music</i> RH, Restoration Hardware Awardee</p> 	<p>Candace Hunter <i>Visual Arts</i> Chandler Family Awardee</p> 
<p>Ayako Kato <i>Dance</i> Reva & David Logan Foundation Awardee</p> 	<p>Maggie Popadiak <i>Theater</i> Reva & David Logan Foundation Awardee</p> 
<p>Tomeka Reid <i>Music</i> Southwest Airlines Awardee</p> 	<p>Aram Han Sifuentes <i>Visual Arts</i> Stan Lipkin & Evelyn Appell Lipkin Awardee</p> 

3ARTS AWARDEES

2017	
<p>Alejandro T. Acierto <i>Visual Arts</i> Denise & Gary Gardner Awardee</p> 	<p>Tirtza Even <i>Visual Arts</i> Reva & David Logan Foundation Awardee</p> 
<p>Ayriole Frost <i>Teaching Arts</i> Samuel G. Roberson Jr. Awardee</p> 	<p>Mabel Kwan <i>Music</i> RH, Restoration Hardware Awardee</p> 
<p>Ginger Lane <i>Dance</i> Community Awardee</p> 	<p>Will Liverman <i>Music</i> Stan Lipkin & Evelyn Appell Lipkin Awardee</p> 
<p>Tara Mallen <i>Theater</i> William Franklin Grisham Awardee</p> 	<p>Meida Teresa McNeal <i>Dance</i> Awardee</p> 
<p>Marcela Muñoz <i>Theater</i> Southwest Airlines Awardee</p> 	<p>Juan-Carlos Perez <i>Teaching Arts</i> Chandler Family Awardee</p> 