



For Immediate Release

January 8, 2020

Contact: Carrie Kikel, 503-480-5360, carrie.kikel@oregon.gov

2021 Individual Artist Fellowships Announced; Okaidja Afroso and Michelle Fujii share Joan Shipley Award

Salem, Oregon – Leading a group of five Oregon performing artists awarded 2021 Individual Artists Fellowships, Okaidja Afroso and Michelle Fujii will share the Oregon Arts Commission’s honorary 2021 Joan Shipley Award. The three additional performing artists awarded 2021 Fellowships are Michael Cavazos, Heidi Duckler and Darryl Thomas. All 2021 Fellows receive \$5,000 awards.

The Joan Shipley Award is named for Oregon arts leader Joan Shipley, who passed away in 2011. Shipley was a collector, philanthropist and supporter of many arts and humanities organizations. In 2005, she and her husband John received an Oregon Governor’s Arts Award. Many in the arts community also counted her as a mentor and friend.

The Arts Commission’s Fellowship program is open to more than 20,000 artists who call Oregon home. Applications to the program are reviewed by a panel of Oregon arts professionals who consider artists of outstanding talent, demonstrated ability and commitment to the creation of new work(s). The Arts Commission reviews and acts on the panel’s recommendations for fellowship recipients. A total of 113 applications were received for 2021 Fellowships. Performing and visual artists are honored in alternating years.

The review panel for the 2021 Fellowships was Christopher Acebo, chair, Arts Commissioner; Alito Alessi, artistic director of DanceAbility International; Alexandra Dass, dancer; Darrell Grant, 2020 Governor’s Arts Award recipient, jazz pianist and educator; Anthony Hudson, FY2019 Fellowship recipient and multidisciplinary artist, writer, performer and filmmaker; Isabelle LaForet Senger, violinist and executive director/founder of High Desert Chamber Music.

Brief biographies and photos follow. Higher resolution photos available on request.



Photo by Jacob Jonas, The Company

Okaidja Afroso, Portland

Okaidja is a multi-instrumentalist, Afro jazz, Afro classical, ambient music, singer, songwriter born into a family of musicians and storytellers in the village of Kokrobite on the west coast of Ghana. He began his career as a dancer with the celebrated Ghana Dance Ensemble, where he was accepted at the age of 19. In 1997 Okaidja toured the United States with the Ensemble. Later that year he traveled solo throughout Germany teaching Ghanaian music and dance before moving to the U.S. to join Okropong, a traditional Ghanaian music and dance group directed by Obo Addy. As he toured internationally, Okaidja expanded his artistic reach to become a master multi-instrumentalist, singer-songwriter and arranger. Okaidja's artistic vision has led him to combine his native rhythms with unforeseen pairings of musical flavors.



Photo by Gary Norman

Michael Cavazos, Portland

Michael is a queer Chicano theatre maker and visual artist. He is the author of the play "Gritos y Chismesitos" and co-author of "Chic and Sassy" and "Chic and Sassy: The Higher the Hair, the Closer to God." Before moving to Portland, he was a member of the sketch comedy troupe Gender Offenders and performed on many New York City stages, including the Beechman Theatre, Cherry Lane Theatre, The Culture Project and P.S. 122. Michael directed and performed in the theatrical concert, "Universo," for Hand2Mouth and has worked with Imago, Milagro, Crave, Profile and Portland Center Stage. He is a company member at Hand2Mouth and is co-directing the new musical "Bad World" with Crave. He is part of two cross-cultural theatre collaborations with companies in Egypt and France. Michael's art was recently selected as part of RACC's new public art collection: Capturing the Moment.



Photo by Rob Daly

Heidi Duckler, Portland

Heidi is the artistic director and founder of Heidi Duckler Dance in Los Angeles and Heidi Duckler Dance/Northwest in Portland. She has created more than 400 original dance works at unique sites throughout Southern California, nationally and internationally. Heidi earned a bachelor's in dance from the University of Oregon and a master's in choreography from UCLA. Her awards include the Distinguished Dance Alumna award from the University of Oregon School in Music and Dance, the Dance/USA and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's Engaging Dance Audiences award and the National Endowment for the Arts American Masterpiece award for her work touring laundromats, "Laundromatinee." She has been honored with the Los Angeles Women's Theatre Festival's Maverick Award and LA Weekly's Best Site-Specific Dance Company. In 2019 she received a commission from the Portland Dance Film Festival and is now in production on several dance films.



Photo by Rich Iwasaki

Michelle Fujii, Portland

Michelle, a taiko artist and co-director of Unit Souzaou, creates contemporary work centered in the art forms of taiko and Japanese folk dance, placing cultural art within the present. Michelle's work navigates the multifaceted complexity of identity in our communities, and has been a constant personal excavation to claim their own identity story. After graduating with a degree in ethnomusicology from UCLA, Michelle was awarded a Bunkacho fellowship from the Japanese government to study with Japan's foremost traditional folk dance company, Warabi-za. Michelle has been a guest artist and collaborator with numerous North American and international taiko groups. They serve on the board of Arts Northwest and are the co-chair of Women & Taiko, a movement dedicated to make visible the contributions of womxn taiko leaders. Michelle is a Jubilation Fellow and has received grants from RACC, Oregon Arts Commission, Oregon Community Foundation and National Performance Network.



Photo by Dale Peterson

Darryl Thomas, Monmouth

Darryl is a professor of dance at Western Oregon University. As co-artistic director of Rainbow Dance Theatre, Darryl has performed and choreographed around the world. A former dancer and artistic collaborator in the world-renowned Pilobolus Dance Theatre, Darryl's performing credits include the 1996 Centennial Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, and the PBS televised special for the 25th Anniversary of the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington DC, for which he received an Emmy. Most recently he performed at the 5th Annual Contemporary Dance Festival in Mexico City. Darryl received his Master of Fine Arts in performance and choreography from the University of Hawaii.

* * * * *

The Oregon Arts Commission provides leadership, funding and arts programs through its grants, special initiatives and services. Nine commissioners, appointed by the Governor, determine arts needs and establish policies for public support of the arts. The Arts Commission became part of Business Oregon (formerly Oregon Economic and Community Development Department) in 1993, in recognition of the expanding role the arts play in the broader social, economic and educational arenas of Oregon communities. In 2003, the Oregon legislature moved the operations of the Oregon Cultural Trust to the Arts Commission, streamlining operations and making use of the Commission's expertise in grantmaking, arts and cultural information and community cultural development.

The Arts Commission is supported with general funds appropriated by the Oregon legislature and with federal funds from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as funds from the Oregon Cultural Trust. More information about the Oregon Arts Commission is available online at: www.oregonartscommission.org.