



The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage 2025 Grantees

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pewcenterarts.org/2025grants

CREATIVE PROJECT GRANTS

This year's creative project grants support 28 institutions with more than \$7.3 million to produce cultural experiences that connect with communities and audiences across the greater Philadelphia region. Projects include newly commissioned works in theater, dance, film, music, and visual art, as well as public art installations and historical exhibitions.

Each amount listed below represents project funding plus an additional 20% in unrestricted, general operating support.

African American Museum in Philadelphia

Tangible : Blacktronika Artifacts & Archives

\$360,000

A multi-sensory exhibition led by King Britt—a composer, producer, performer, and professor—celebrates the contributions of Black innovators in electronic music. Continuing the work of UK DJ Charlie Dark MBE, Britt and co-curator Eugene Lew organize installations of audio, video, and tools such as drum machines, samplers, and turntables. Interactive workshops and performances expand on the stories of Black musical pioneers who shaped global culture.

Arden Theatre Company

Their Eyes Were Watching God

\$360,000

A new play by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright James Ijames adapts Zora Neale Hurston's landmark 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. A story about community, resilience, and transformation, *Their Eyes* comes to life in partnership with Orlando Shakes, a theater near Hurston's hometown of Eatonville, Florida. The play follows central character Janie's struggles in a world shaped by patriarchy and racism and her journey to self-discovery.

Asian Arts Initiative

Joyce Ho: Coffee Protocol

\$300,000

A multi-site exhibition of video sculptures, drawings, and paintings examines the “in-between” of everyday spaces with installations at both Asian Art's Initiative's gallery and venues such as cafes

and bookstores in Philadelphia. Created by designer and multimedia artist Joyce Ho, *Coffee Protocol* focuses on immigrants, BIPOC individuals, and service workers to explore daily rituals, gathering, and labor in places where public and private blur.

Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra

Black Women Composers Initiative

\$179,183

Concerts, panel discussions, and a podcast showcase living and historical Black woman composers making contemporary orchestral music. In response to *Black Composers Series: 1974–1978*—an important recording collection that introduced listeners and orchestras to Black composers but neglected to include women—this project offers a more balanced and comprehensive representation by spotlighting award-winning composers Courtney Bryan, Valerie Coleman, Hannah Kendall, and Julia Perry.

Delaware River Waterfront Corporation

Sail Through This To That

\$300,000

A large-scale artwork on the Delaware River explores the pursuit of freedom and connects the lives of two women across centuries: Ona Judge, an enslaved seamstress to Martha Washington, and Rem'mie Fells, an aspiring fashion designer and trans woman killed in 2020. The installation is created by artist Indira Allegra, curated by Rob Blackson, and presented in partnership with ArtPhilly. It features vibrant sails to be paraded during a public procession from Philadelphia's Old City to the river and flown from a schooner docked in Spruce Street Harbor.

Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site

ReVision: Art and Justice at Eastern State

\$360,000

Artists impacted by the criminal justice system develop site-specific works at America's first penitentiary as part of an eight-month artist-in-residence program. Encompassing guided tours, salon-style conversations with legal experts and historians, and video content documenting the artists' work, *ReVision* focuses on advancing public understanding of the criminal justice system through narratives rooted in empathy, dignity, and lived experience.

History Making Productions (fiscally sponsored by CultureTrust Greater Philadelphia)

In Pursuit: Philadelphia and the Making of America

\$108,000

A ten-part documentary series, directed by Andrew Ferrett and written by Nathaniel Popkin, offers a deep dive into the history of American democratic life through the lens of Philadelphia. Released during the nation's Semiquincentennial—as both a television broadcast on 6abc and at multiple community screening events across the region—*In Pursuit* spotlights the diverse experiences of Philadelphians and the city's unique role in shaping the founding ideals of the country.

Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania

A Slow Drag for the Conjure Women (working title)

\$360,000

Artist and filmmaker Allison Janae Hamilton furthers her examination of Black Southern life, nature, memory, and community in her first solo museum show and exhibition catalogue, surveying existing and newly commissioned works. In sculpture, film, photography, and installation, Hamilton creates immersive environments that intertwine personal family narratives, imagery of domestic spaces, legacies of displacement, and the flora and fauna of the American South.

Institute on Disabilities, Temple University

You Caught Me on Your Shoulders by Kinetic Light

\$360,000

A multi-sensory dance performance created by disability arts ensemble Kinetic Light presents a series of vignettes based on significant moments in disability advocacy and culture. Recognized for its innovative approach to access, Kinetic Light rejects traditional assumptions that dance must be experienced exclusively through sight and makes use of captions, ASL interpretation, haptic vibration, and multiple styles of audio description for choreography, soundscapes, and score—offering audiences multiple pathways to experience the work.

Leonard Pearlstein Gallery, Drexel University

Escape->Control->Play

\$90,000

An interactive exhibition looks at video games as a means of community building, creative expression, and social critique. Transforming the gallery space to feel more like an arcade, *Escape->Control->Play* invites audiences to play games created by independent producers and view gaming from a range of historic and present-day perspectives. From early 8-bit games to contemporary pieces inspired by their visual language, the installation considers the bridge between gaming and art.

Monument Lab

[birdsong]

\$360,000

Three new environmental soundworks create a living monument to Philadelphia's birds, inviting audiences to gather for deep listening: to birds, to one another, and to the places we cohabitate. Curator Yolanda Wisher works with vocalists and sound artists Mendi & Keith Obadike, Raúl Romero, and Hanna Tuulikki, as well as ornithologists and wildlife biologists, exploring the intersections of public memory, environmental stewardship, and ecology through sound.

Mural Arts Philadelphia

New Deals: Artists Commune with Infrastructure

\$360,000

Three interdisciplinary artists investigate and respond to civic infrastructure and its relationship to public art in newly commissioned artworks. Maia Chao focuses on Philadelphia's trolley network, while misael soto looks at the city's air quality, and Alex Strada examines its sidewalks in projects that seek to better understand infrastructure at a human scale and celebrate the labor, care, and investment in municipal systems that impact shared public life.

Museum of Music Technology/EMEAPP

Instruments That Talk Back: Celebrating the Legacy of Don Buchla

\$108,000

An exhibition surveys the work and impact of Don Buchla, a synthesizer pioneer and influential figure in electronic music. Encompassing performances, workshops, and lectures, the project charts a path from Buchla's analog instruments developed in the 1960s to his digital innovations of the 2000s. It also engages with his core collaborators, including composers, engineers, and scholars, as well as contemporary artists who perform newly composed pieces using instruments Buchla designed.

Orchestra 2001

A More Perfect Union: Musical Reflections on Five Amendments to the U.S. Constitution

\$172,800

A performance series during America's 250th anniversary interprets five important constitutional amendments through contemporary classical music. Featuring both new commissions and existing works from thirty American composers—including many based in Philadelphia—*A More Perfect Union* examines the nation's blueprint for democracy and provokes thoughts on freedoms of speech, religion, press, and assembly; the right to bear arms; the abolition of slavery; women's suffrage; and the repeal of prohibition.

Philadelphia Clef Club of Jazz & Performing Arts

Soundscapes for Tomorrow: Stage One Residencies

\$240,000

Five acclaimed jazz artists develop new work and give audiences a window into the creative process in a newly created artist-in-residence program. Composers and multi-instrumentalists Tia Fuller, Derrick Hodge, Nabate Isles, Papo Vazquez, and Miguel Zenon participate in collaborative rehearsals, artist talks, public workshops, and a culminating performance held at the Clef Club and livestreamed globally.

Philadelphia Dance Company (PHILADANCO!)

For the Love of Philly

\$250,290

Music from the Philadelphia International Records catalog provides the soundtrack for four ballets celebrating the legacy of Gamble and Huff's Philly Soul sound and over five decades of

PHILADANCO. The program features new commissions by Dawn Marie Bazemore and Rennie Harris and remounted works by Dwight Rhoden and Gene Hill Sagan, reflecting a broad spectrum of Black dance and representing the past, present, and future of the dance company.

Philadelphia Dance Projects

SERMON

\$80,400

A new work conceived and choreographed by Tommie-Waheed Evans reimagines performance as ritual, transforming contemporary dance into a participatory spiritual gathering rooted in Black queer experience. Designed in a sanctuary-like setting and with an original score by Omar-Frederick, the performance evokes the architecture, music, and emotional intensity of Black church traditions, while reclaiming those spaces for new forms of belonging, communal healing, and spiritual inquiry.

Philadelphia's Magic Gardens

Held Within

\$239,970

Chilean artist Carmen Mardonez uses textiles to develop two site-specific exhibitions exploring intimacy and womanhood—installed in the galleries at the Magic Gardens Museum and at its recently opened, ten-thousand-square-foot studio location in South Philadelphia. Mardonez interweaves her embroidery and beaded techniques with materials sourced from the archives of Magic Gardens artist and creator Isaiah Zagar to create “soft worlds,” presented in contrast to Zagar's “hard-edged mosaics.”

The Philadelphia Orchestra

The Party

\$360,000

A genre-blending, contemporary opera combines performance with modern visual storytelling in a new collaboration with artist Alex Da Corte and composer Austin Fisher. Marisol Escobar's 1965 sculptural installation *The Party* comes to life through a cinematic reimagining that features surreal, stop-motion animation, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and a cast of singers. The production explores themes of femininity, image, and artifice as it satirizes social rituals and consumer culture.

Philadelphia Theatre Company

La Guagua 47: An American Musical

\$360,000

A bilingual musical written by Alba Martí nez and directed by Laurie Woolery explores themes of belonging, migration, and the search for home. Framed around an eye-opening ride on SEPTA's 47 bus taken by a Puerto Rican girl new to Philadelphia, this world premiere production celebrates and reflects the city's Latino community, blending musical styles such as salsa, bachata, soul, and hip-hop and is performed in both Spanish and English.

The Print Center

America Today

\$300,000

Contemporary artworks from six community-centered, mission-based printshops across the US come together to consider the breadth of the American experience in the context of the nation's 250th anniversary. Accompanied by gallery talks, public programs, and a publication, *America Today* highlights new voices in printmaking and the power of print as a medium for expressing political ideals and urgent concerns.

PRISM Quartet

Roots and Branches

\$198,000

A concert encompassing traditional and newly commissioned compositions extends and reimagines the heritage of roots, folk, and bluegrass music from the Black diaspora. Roots musicians Leyla McCalla and Jake Blount act as the project's curators, composers, and performers, forming a new ensemble that combines PRISM's saxophonists with string and percussion instruments for a live performance, radio broadcast, and studio recording.

Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center

Cultural Exchange with Delaware Tribe Cultural Education Department

\$241,104

A multi-year cultural exchange between the Delaware Tribe of Indians in Oklahoma and the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center fosters an inclusive and authentic interpretation of regional history. Informed by in-person visits between Pennsylvania and Oklahoma, the project illuminates the rich multicultural history of the Perkiomen Valley in Western Montgomery County and highlights the region's Lenape roots through an exhibition of historical items, newly commissioned works, and stories of the Delaware Tribe's homeland.

Vox Populi

An Endless Meeting: Collective Process, Artistic Labor, and the Politics of Working Together

\$135,600

A multi-pronged project surveys the practices of collaboration and collective action, looking to artist-run creative spaces for insights into working together across differences. Interactive exhibitions, performances, workshops, roundtables, and a print publication encourage reflections on collective artmaking and offer a model for building communities beyond the arts.

We Are the Seeds (fiscally sponsored by CultureTrust Greater Philadelphia)

this situation: an examination of myth and memory

\$132,000

The historical painting *Penn's Treaty with the Indians* serves as a conceptual anchor for a new theater piece centering contemporary Indigenous presence, creativity, and joy while confronting historical erasure and ongoing threats to sovereignty. Developed by a team of Indigenous artists and collaborators, the production challenges dominant narratives of peaceful colonization

through original music, dance, live painting, archival material, and digital media.

Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History

The First Salute: An Untold Story of the American Revolution

\$360,000

An expansive exhibition marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by giving voice to a group rarely featured in the story of America's revolution: the Jewish people. Presenting material culture, first person narratives, and historical records, the exhibition explores how 18th-century American Jewish experiences offer new insight into the Declaration and the country's pursuit of religious liberty and self-determination.

Wilma Theater

The Animal Farm Project

\$360,000

A reflection on the production of *Animal Farm* that launched the Wilma in 1979, this newly devised staging explores questions of power, corruption, resistance, and hope. Lead artist and Wilma HotHouse Acting Company member Justin Jain and director Eva Steinmetz draw from George Orwell's allegorical novel and incorporate multimedia design, docu-theater elements, and migrant stories collected through workshops and community interviews to create a contemporary examination of oppressive regimes.

WXPN, University of Pennsylvania

Declarations of Independents: Philly Anthems

\$323,460

Musicians from Philadelphia share their perspective on America's founding document in a multi-faceted project honoring the country's Semiquincentennial. Featuring commissioned new anthems by established artists—including Eric Bazilian (The Hooters), Devon Gilfillian, and Eliza Hardy Jones (The War On Drugs)—a songwriting challenge for emerging artists, workshops, live performances, and a vinyl LP, the project offers contemporary reflections on the concept of independence.

EVOLVING FUTURES GRANTS

This year, the Center expanded Evolving Futures grants to include planning grants that support organizations in researching and developing new business models and revenue growth strategies. These planning grants provide important risk capital toward the advancement of sustainable and successful futures for Philadelphia's cultural institutions.

Each amount listed below represents project funding plus an additional 20% in unrestricted, general operating support.

EgoPo Classic Theater

\$66,660

EgoPo undertakes a strategic planning and feasibility process to create a path toward establishing a permanent performance venue that is rooted in community engagement. Working with consultants in nonprofit finance, real estate, and law, the theater company considers how a shift from producing as a site-specific, itinerant company to working from a neighborhood-based permanent home will affect its operations, audience engagement, and artistic processes.

The Fabric Workshop and Museum

\$72,000

As it approaches its 50th anniversary, The Fabric Workshop and Museum explores opportunities to expand artist and community access as an institution "committed to sharing both process and product." With guidance from consultants and thinking partners in the museum field, FWM develops a plan that will grow earned revenue while delivering increased value, leading to successful entrepreneurial practices and greater sustainability.

Mendelssohn Chorus of Philadelphia

\$72,000

Drawing on its more than 150-year legacy, Mendelssohn Chorus seeks to address its single-staff operational challenges by researching and establishing a choral collective designed to share administrative, fundraising, and audience development functions. In collaboration with a nonprofit consulting firm, the chorus conducts a two-phase study: first researching the regional choral ecosystem and potential collaborative frameworks and then engaging with other organizations to co-design a model that embraces collaboration and fosters long-term sustainability.

South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA)

\$72,000

In a year-long study, SAADA seeks to leverage its community archiving expertise to create revenue-generating products and services that help tell the stories of America's diverse immigrant populations. Working with consultants to conduct market research, SAADA develops program models that meet the need for heritage preservation and intergenerational storytelling while establishing a plan for expanded reach and sustainable income.

PEW FELLOWSHIPS

Supporting artists since 1992, the Pew Fellowships in the Arts program nurtures local artistic talent through 12 annual unrestricted grants. This year's fellowships total \$1 million to support a dozen Philadelphia-area artists, each receiving \$85,000 in unrestricted funds.

Jos Duncan Asé (she/her)

Filmmaker

“The stories I tell are a vessel to honor the care between people, the traditions passed down in kitchens and living rooms, the dreams whispered into existence, and resistance born from love.”

Through documentary filmmaking centered on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, Duncan Asé uses storytelling to amplify community voices and themes of remembrance, reflection, and affirmation. Her films chronicle narratives ranging from intimate conversations in hair salons, to a mother striving to save her son from gang violence, to the legacy of a Black female opera company founder during the Jim Crow era.

Kendrah Butler-Waters (she/her)

Composer and musician

“I am a musician who believes that to truly see each other in our fullest humanity, our quietest, humblest stories need to be lived, loved, and listened to out loud.”

As a composer, pianist, vocalist, and educator, Butler-Waters takes inspiration from family, cultural memory, faith, and experiences of Black motherhood, seeking to “tell stories of belonging, identity, and love.” Her compositions draw on her study of classical and jazz, blended with gospel and soul influences, and her community-based work often features interdisciplinary collaboration, placing music in conversation with film, spoken word, and performance.

John E. Dowell Jr. (he/him)

Visual artist

“I believe that art should open a space where the audience can locate themselves, and in doing so, find something deeply personal and possibly transformative.”

An interdisciplinary artist with a career spanning six decades, Dowell's work captures the pulse of America's cities and agricultural landscapes as seen between sunset and dawn. Through paintings, prints, and photography, as well as performance, sound, and installation work, he explores themes such as surrealism, the Black experience, ancestry, and our shared humanity.

Emma Copley Eisenberg (she/her)

Writer

“My work is about the space between the authentic self, and the self that the world reduces us to, particularly for queer people, fat people, and women.”

Eisenberg is a writer of fiction and nonfiction about embodied experience, centering “fat people from many walks of life.” Her work emerges from queer literary traditions, interrogating issues of gender, race, and class and challenging conventional stories told about nonnormative bodies in contemporary fiction. Her books include 2024’s *Housemates*, a national indie bestseller, and the forthcoming short story collection *Fat Swim* (Penguin Random House).

Jonathan González (he/him)

Choreographer and artist

“The force of my work lies in its proposal of alternative representations for how we can holistically come together to exercise risk, care, trust, and intimacy.”

González creates performances and time-based media that consider memory, duration, and site, employing dance as means for “worldbuilding” in locations such as museums, theaters, churches, gardens, parking lots, and street corners. As a scholar, he fuses rigorous research and historical excavation—particularly around Black cultural narratives—with elements of movement, sound, video, and text in immersive environments where artists and audiences can share moments of collective action.

Rose Jarboe (she/her)

Director, performance artist, and host

“I make art to cultivate pockets of nurture for misfits like me to see themselves and feel belonging.”

Jarboe’s creative practice spans theater, opera, cabaret, film, and immersive installations—both in her solo work and in her role as founding artistic director of The Bearded Ladies Cabaret. She creates spaces that foster explorations of gender, belonging, and “queer communal imagination and healing,” working in traditional theater and gallery settings as well as in neighborhoods across Philadelphia by way of a mobile performance truck.

Nathalie Joachim (she/her)

Composer and performer

“As a Haitian-American performer and composer, my creative practice carries the legacy of my heritage in that it is rooted in storytelling and human connectivity.”

In recordings as a solo artist and compositions for orchestras, chamber ensembles, and operas, Joachim centers an authentic commitment to storytelling, connection, social change, and cultural awareness. Interweaving Haitian folkloric and Western classical music with research and oral histories, she illuminates ancestry, personal lineage, and identity in a body of work she describes as “a tapestry of and testament to the histories, humanity, and potential futures of African diasporic people.”

Rebecca Kanach (she/her)

Costume designer

“Clothing sets the terms of perception before anything unfolds and has the power to tell a story in itself. As a designer I’m most interested in stories of radical joy, transformation, and liberation.”

Kanach's costume designs interrogate clothing not only as adornment, but for its narrative and cultural potential. Working with custom-printed fabrics, thrifted materials, and everyday objects, she creates work that "lives at the intersection of costume, textiles, installation, and performance." Kanach has collaborated across cabaret, theater, opera, and dance. She is a co-founder and resident costume designer of The Bearded Ladies Cabaret and a company member of Lightning Rod Special.

José Ortiz-Pagán (he/him)

Multidisciplinary artist

"My work seeks to protect and restore the capacity to imagine otherwise—to reclaim meaning, connection, and hope on our own terms."

Ortiz-Pagán is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice encompasses performance, sculpture, painting, drawing, and printmaking. His experience growing up in Puerto Rico and coming to Philadelphia informs a body of work that examines displacement, movement, and adaptation. His collaborative, community-centered work within North Philadelphia's Fairhill and Kensington neighborhoods engages with expressions of healing, collective care, and spiritual traditions.

George Rodriguez (he/him)

Visual artist

"I want to bring more beauty into the world in the form of decorative objects. My work aims to show people how connected we are culturally, globally, and personally."

Rodriguez creates highly-ornamented, figurative ceramic sculptures that incorporate colors and patterns inspired by his Mexican American heritage. Filled with cultural and historical imagery, and often large in scale, his work blends interests in human psychology and community with a love for decoration and embellishment. His practice extends to community-oriented making, teaching people how to press tiles to make a collective mural, or collaborating with artists across the US and Mexico.

Sosena Solomon (she / her)

Filmmaker and multimedia visual artist

"I aim to expand the boundaries of documentary art, demonstrating its potential not only as a tool for historical record but also as a means of cultural dialogue and healing."

Through a combination of film, installation, and archival methods, Solomon seeks to document and reimagine the complex experiences of African communities undergoing transition. Foregrounding personal narratives, her work explores culture and identity—as seen in projects like a permanent 12-part film installation for The Metropolitan Museum of Art highlighting major cultural landmarks across sub-Saharan Africa and the caretakers who preserve them.

Omar Tate (he/him)

Visual artist and chef

"My practice is an invitation to remember differently, viewing the meal as a beginning—a site of reflection, connection, and transformation—rather than just an end product."

Tate uses food as a medium for storytelling and cultural preservation. His curated culinary experiences assert cooking as a fine art that can express complex narratives about identity, memory, and history. In his visual artworks, collaborations with other artists, and his Philadelphia restaurant Honeysuckle, Tate connects people with Black creative lineages and cuisine.

Media Contact

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