



# Memorandum

**TO:** EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Kerry Adams Hapner

**SUBJECT: CREATIVE AMBASSADOR  
SELECTION**

**DATE:** October 30, 2023

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

Review and accept the panel's recommendation of the following five 2024 Creative Ambassadorships: Deborah Kennedy, Alice Hur, Yosimar Reyes, Rayos Magos, and Pantea Karimi.

## **BACKGROUND**

The role of the Creative Ambassadors is to champion the power of creative expression and engage members of the public in finding their creative voice. First started in FY 2018-2019, the Creative Ambassadors is a program of the San José Creates and Connects initiative launched by the Office of Cultural Affairs ("OCA") to connect residents across communities and within neighborhoods through creative, participatory experiences.

Creative Ambassadors serve a one-year term and are selected on a competitive basis to complete a scope of work that includes a creative expression project, which engages the public as active, creative participants. Ambassadors are also expected to promote the importance of creative expression in everyday life by utilizing social media, participating in interviews and the WeCreate408 challenge, and promoting public expression at public events as relevant.

Funding for the Creative Ambassador Program is provided by The David and Lucille Packard Foundation (hereinafter, the "Packard Foundation"), which has been providing financial support of the program for several years. In June 2023, OCA also received notification of a \$30,000 grant award from the National Endowment for the Arts ("NEA"), ensuring support for the 2024 round of Creative Ambassadors. Support from the Packard Foundation and the NEA also enabled OCA to increase the number of potential Ambassadors from four to five with an award of \$9,500 each.

## ANALYSIS

Guidelines for the 2024 Creative Ambassadors were released on August 14, 2023, with applications due on October 6, 2023. A total of 35 eligible applications were received. A panel consisting of an Arts Commissioner, one Creative Ambassador Alumni, and two members of the San José creative community reviewed the applications on October 17, 2023, via Zoom. Interviews with the top six (6) finalists, were held via Zoom on October 24, 2023. The review panel included the following:

- **Stephanie Barajas**, 2022 Creative Ambassador
- **Tshaka Campbell**, Santa Clara County Poet Laureate
- **Laura Chmielewski**, VP of Marketing and Communications, Team San José
- **Steven Martinez**, San José Arts Commissioner and artist

Applications were reviewed according to the following published criteria:

- **Artistic Track Record (15%)**, including work samples, public presentation history, and professional achievement.
- **Community Engagement Track Record (15%)**, including a demonstrated initiative in directly launching and coordinating creative projects involving the community and responding to the cultural diversity of San José.
- **Communication Experience (15%)** with demonstrated ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing, including in public.
- **Professionalism (15%)** reflecting the values of the City of San José, including a commitment to honor diverse views and backgrounds.
- **Creative Expression Project Plan (40%)** including the philosophical approach to community engagement, innovation of proposed creative strategies, and understanding of the project's target cultural communities.

After careful deliberation, the panel recommended the highest-scoring scoring applicants to serve as 2024 Creative Ambassadors. The five selected applicants are:

**Deborah Kennedy** is an artist and author who communicates complex social and environmental themes with her intricately-crafted, conceptually-based installations, books, and performances. She brings visual drama and compelling experiences to viewers in galleries, museums, and public spaces. She earned her BFA from U.C. Berkeley, Phi Beta Kappa, and her MFA from SJSU. Her work has received numerous grants, awards, and reviews, including an Arts Council SV Artist Fellowship and a California Arts Council grant. Kennedy is also a committed educator who taught in community colleges and at Santa Clara University. Her proposed Creative Expression Project, *The Broadside Art and Poetry Project* will foster, celebrate, and share the many voices in our communities and bring art and poetry to the lives of ordinary citizens. The final work of enlarged and printed broadsides will be presented in a variety of settings, including Local Color's site, in shop windows with prior written permission, distributed at public events like farmer's markets and digital broadsides which can also be posted on social media. This project is fiscally sponsored by Local Color.

**Alice Hur** is a dancer who is the creator of the recurring grassroots Bay Area event series Waack, Crackle, Lock!, which takes place in Oakland and San José. As an active participant within the broader street dance community, Hur has battled throughout the Midwest, Bay Area, Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, and Toronto. Recently, Hur was awarded a 2023 California Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship and is a featured artist for the Merde Project in San Francisco this November. Her proposed Creative Expression Project, *Disco Connections*, is an extension of the San José Waacking. This expressive form was created in Los Angeles gay clubs during the late 1960s and 1970s and consists of dramatic poses, storytelling, and rapid arm movements synchronized to disco beats. This series embodies the goals of the Creative Ambassador program by providing multiple engagement opportunities for the public to find their creative voice through waacking. While this programming highlights street dancers and the BIPOC queer community she developed relationships with throughout their organizing experiences, this series is for any San José resident interested in dance. Through the workshops and mini-classes, participants can learn tools to develop their own forms of storytelling via movement. The “takeover nights” capitalize on the liveliness of San José’s vibrant nightlife and place this dance back in the club context in which it was created. Attendees of the outdoor event can witness expert practitioners of waacking during the battle and engage with them directly during the open freestyle dance circles, blurring the line between audience member and participant.

**Rayos Magos** is a Latinx/Chicano male mixed-media artist from San José, CA. Rayos’ work focuses on symbolism, healing, spirituality, mental health, and social justice. Rayos explores personal narratives and universal themes via collage, printmaking, painting, and sculpture. Magos holds a Master’s in Expressive Arts Therapy from the California Institute of Integral Studies. His proposed Creative Expression project is *Storytelling through Printmaking*. The goal would be to create symbolic self-representations and print those to tell personal narratives. The project aims to encourage art-making, self-expression, and personal narrative storytelling to encourage healing and preservation of cultural practices and rituals. The project's final outcome would be to create a book documenting the personal symbolic imagery created, curating storytelling and body of work created to structure the work's documentation in book/zine form. The hope would be to encourage and empower community members to teach and be active in documenting their stories through art. This project is fiscally sponsored by Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA).

**Yosimar Reyes** is a nationally-acclaimed poet and public speaker. Born in Guerrero, Mexico, and raised in East San José, Reyes explores the themes of migration and sexuality in his work. The Advocate named Reyes one of "13 LGBT Latinos Changing the World," and Remezcla included Reyes on their list of "10 Up And Coming Latinx Poets You Need To Know." The proposed Creative Expression Project, *Festival De Los Abuelitos*, is a vibrant and community-centered event designed to celebrate and engage our elders. *El Festival De Los Abuelitos* will occur Sunday afternoon in San José's Parque de los Pobladores. The festival will feature live musical performances, physical activities tailored to elders' mobility levels and an on-site photographer to capture family portraits, preserving precious memories. Overall, *Festival De Los Abuelitos* is a project that aims to celebrate and honor our elders, combat isolation, and create a sense of belonging within the community. It provides a platform for creative expression, fosters intergenerational connections, and offers valuable resources to support the well-being of our elderly population. Through this project, Reyes envisions a park filled with diverse elders, their families,

and the broader community coming together to collectively give our elders the recognition and appreciation they deserve.

**Pantea Karimi** is an Iranian-American multidisciplinary artist, researcher, and educator based in San José. Guided by her education in both science and art and her parents' practice, Karimi's work explores the history of medicinal botany and geometry using virtual reality, performative video, animation, sound, print, drawing, and installation. Karimi's works have been exhibited internationally, including in Iran, Algeria, Germany, Croatia, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States. She is the recipient of 2024 MASS MoCA Artist Residency, the Santa Fe Art Institute 2024 Sovereignty Artist Residency, the 2023-2026 Lucas Artist Program Residency at Montalvo Art Center, amongst other residencies and awards. The proposed Creative Expression project, *Garden Impressions*, celebrates San José Historic Rose Gardens, Guadalupe River Park, and the volunteers who maintain them. Using collected botanical clippings during volunteering hours, participants make colorful small-size monoprints on paper, reflecting on volunteering and the importance of keeping San José parks and historic gardens alive and pruned. Monoprinting is an accessible, expressive, water-based medium open to interpretation. Karimi will take photos of processes and prints and design a website where she will exhibit them that also contributes to the project's legacy. The website link is sharable. The project encourages and highlights a kind act of volunteering and advocates a deeper sense of belonging to the City of San José through civic service. The *Garden Impressions* project has significant relevance to the City's current project called "Our City Forest" and pays homage to the past San José historic orchards and garden industries and the community of farmers and gardeners who lived here and cared for them. This project is fiscally sponsored by Local Color.

Each Creative Ambassador will receive a stipend of \$9,500 to produce a creative expression project and promote creative expression through their networks. A final proposal for the Ambassador's creative project must be presented to OCA for approval before implementation, and all projects must comply with City and County regulations.

At the end of their residency, Creative Ambassadors will be required to submit a final report with documentation of project activities. The success of the Creative Ambassador program will be measured by the strength of the creative projects, the level of engagement of San José residents, the quality and placement of featured articles, and the traction of the creative expression messaging on social media related to the Ambassadors' projects.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

The Creative License Ambassador guidelines were posted on the City's website on August 14, 2023, and disseminated through the Office of Cultural Affairs distribution lists, partner sites such as the California Arts Council's Opportunities, SV Creates, City Council District Offices, multiple San José Facebook groups, and local cultural partner email lists. In addition to multiple organic social media posts, multi-lingual paid social media posts were distributed across Facebook, Instagram and Spotify. Creative Ambassador promotional videos and blogs were posted on the SJ Economy Blog

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and distributed widely. A public information session for potential applicants was held via Zoom on August 23, 2023 and drop-in office hours were held September 25 – 29, 2023 via Zoom.

/s/

KERRY ADAMS HAPNER  
Director of Cultural Affairs