



Contact: Ryan Strand  
Senior Director, Marketing & Communications  
513.632.0148: [ryan.strand@artswave.org](mailto:ryan.strand@artswave.org)

## **ArtsWave Awards \$222,000 to 26 BIPOC Artists in Fifth Year of Annual Grant Program**

CINCINNATI, OH [January 21, 2025] – ArtsWave, Cincinnati's engine for the arts, has awarded \$222,000 in grants to 26 local BIPOC artists through its 2025 Black and Brown Artist Program. Now in its fifth year, this initiative supports artists who challenge audiences to envision a more equitable future through the lens of Truth and Innovation.

"This year's cohort of Black and Brown artists represents some of the best of Cincinnati's creative spirit," said Alecia Kintner, President & CEO of ArtsWave. "Their projects, spanning film, dance, literature, music, and visual arts, will not only push artistic boundaries but also spark crucial conversations about identity, equity and our shared human experience."

This year's grant recipients will explore themes deeply resonant with contemporary society, such as preserving cultural heritage and addressing mental health challenges in minority communities. Projects include Ashley Glass's documentary on inspiring diversity in behavioral health, Ingrid Woode's tribute to classical pianist Geneva Woode, Brandon Hawkins' mural celebrating the Black Autism community, and more (all projects listed below).

The Black and Brown Artist Program is part of ArtsWave's commitment to fostering a more inclusive arts ecosystem. By providing financial support and visibility to BIPOC artists, the program supports one of ArtsWave's long-term strategic goals: bridging cultural divides and elevating historically underrepresented voices in the arts.

The program's impact extends beyond financial support. Grant recipients participate in professional development workshops focusing on grant writing, project management, and business development—equipping them with tools for sustainable artistic careers.

"By investing in these artists, we're not just funding projects – we're nurturing the next generation of cultural leaders who will shape Cincinnati's artistic identity for years to come," added Kintner.

Michael Thompson, a previous grant recipient and now a Mentor and Showcase Coordinator within the grant program, is one of those leaders, "The program has been vital to my early career, helping me connect with the arts ecosystem, build meaningful relationships, and refine my ideas professionally. The grant funding gave me the autonomy to bring my artistic visions to life—an opportunity artists rarely have."

The Black and Brown Artist Program is made possible through partnerships with the City of Cincinnati and Duke Energy, as well as annual ArtsWave Campaign donors, underscoring the community's collective commitment to fostering diversity in the arts.

As in previous years, ArtsWave is planning a professional showcase featuring all 26 funded projects. Dates and locations for the event will be revealed in the coming months, promising a celebration of creativity, diversity and the transformative power of art.

For more information about the artists and organizations funded through ArtsWave, visit [artswave.org](http://artswave.org).

###

### **About ArtsWave**

ArtsWave, the local nonprofit arts agency serving the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky region, is the engine for the arts. Its roots stem back to the late 1920s when the Cincinnati Taft family provided initial investment matched by community support. In the late 1940s, it established the first United Arts Fund in the nation and, in the mid-1970s, the first organization to initiate workplace giving for the arts. ArtsWave continues to innovate while leading, as illustrated by its No. 1 rank nationally in community arts fundraising, coordination of a sector-wide Blueprint for Collective Action, piloting of new technologies to maximize arts engagement and development of resources for the arts. Each year, ArtsWave raises millions of dollars from tens of thousands of donors — corporations, employees, foundations, residents and others — to support more than 150 arts organizations, projects and artists. This year, ArtsWave raised a record \$12.5 million through its yearly campaign from individuals, businesses and foundations to further the region's strategic growth goals. Donations can be made at [artswave.org/give](http://artswave.org/give).

## 2025 Black and Brown Artist Program Project Descriptions

### **Ashley Glass** | *Inspiring the Future of Behavioral Health*

This short documentary aims to address the critical shortage of minorities in the behavioral health field by highlighting the need for diversity and inspiring young individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue careers in mental health, counseling, social work, and related disciplines. Through powerful storytelling, the film seeks to educate, motivate, and empower viewers to consider the behavioral health field not just as a career choice, but to make a meaningful impact in their communities.

### **Doug Hilson** | *Eterna Bloom*

*Eterna Bloom* is a film about a serum meant to save, but at what cost? When a desperate biochemist's experiment goes wrong, his wife's miraculous recovery spirals into a fight for her sanity. The line between life and identity blurs. Can love survive when the mind breaks? Filmmaker Doug Hilson challenges audiences to reflect on identity, memory, and the societal implications of healthcare disparities, inspiring a conversation about the value of life and the truths we hold dear.

### **Alicia Redmond** | *Willows - A Limited Series - Episode 1*

Inspired by Redmond's short film, *Willows*, and the rich history of Lincoln Heights, the first incorporated African American community above the Mason-Dixon line, *Willows - A Limited Series* will be loosely based on this story. Set throughout the early 20th century, the series explores the lives of Dorothy and Katherine, estranged sisters reconciling their relationship, as well as highlight some of the struggles and triumphs of the community's residents as they fight to preserve their identity and legacy in the face of discrimination and societal change.

### **Ingrid Woode** | *Cakewalk*

*Cakewalk* is a short documentary about Cincinnati-born classical pianist prodigy and lifelong educator Geneva Woode, who started her career in the aftermath of the civil rights movement. From contributing to the recordings on some of James Brown's biggest hits, and playing with symphonies, to being a Cincinnati Public Schools music teacher, Geneva's influence stretches across many genres and generations. This film celebrates her resilience, talent, and impact on American music and education, offering a moving tribute of a woman who shaped culture while overcoming societal obstacles.

### **Gabriel Martinez Rubio** | *HOME*

*HOME* is a project divided into two parts. There will be three bilingual, Spanish and English, workshops for children in the community introducing them to movement and shadow puppetry. The participants will develop their creativity by creating characters or objects with which they identify and learn about themselves through the creative process. The second part of the project is a contemporary dance piece that includes a video created from stories of Cincinnati residents. Through interviews, these residents will

tell us about their concept of home, and will invite us to reflect on diversity, inclusion, migration, human rights, and love.

**Freda Epum** | *I Dream of Labor: Disabled in a Productive World*

*I Dream of Labor* is an essay collection by a Black disabled woman artist, exploring her navigation of capitalism as a worker in the attention economy. During the pandemic, her career quickly advanced with a promotion, but burnout soon followed. Seeking guidance, she scoured personal development books and turned to social media, hoping to find other girl bosses like herself. However, she discovered a lack of representation for Black and disabled girl bosses in these spaces. This absence led her to delve deeper into her experiences and connections. In her work, the artist examines her parasocial relationships with everyday Black women and disabled individuals.

**TT Stern-Enzi** | *God Sent Me*

*God Sent Me* is the third part of a book-length project that blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction. The overall project is comprised of a series of personal essays & interviews called "Stepping In (To Fatherhood)", an incomplete novel based on the artist's desire to create their father on the page before meeting him in-person called "Finding Father", and a collection of short stories that explore the personal mythology of the artist's absent father and prostate cancer journey.

**Óscar Salamanca Alarcón** | *Así Somos: Echoes of Migration*

"Así Somos: Echoes of Migration," a journey through migration, told through the universal language of music, features six songs representing Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, Chile, and Guatemala. Each explores the paths these communities have taken, their resilience, and their impact on Cincinnati. The artist will perform using traditional instruments and a loop station, creating an authentic, layered experience. Each song will invite reflection on the mental, physical, and social aspects of migration, celebrating stories, culture, and connection through sound.

**Ziaire Sherman** | *What's Next*

"What's Next" is a series of masterclasses for all skill levels, offering a close look at how spontaneous moments evolve into building blocks for growing musical expression. These workshops will allow composers to hear their music played live with real-time feedback. These jam sessions will create a safe space for Black and Brown creatives to thrive. Accompanying these events, Ziaire's ensemble, Zion, will be developing their EP, RYB which showcases how spontaneous creation can be cemented.

**Myles Ellington Twitty** | *True Blackness*

"True Blackness" is the artist's debut album featuring frequent collaborators: Josh Kline on Sax, Dan Karlsberg on Piano, Justin Dawson on Bass and Phil Tipton on Drums. This project will feature arrangements of pieces from the Black diaspora including "Wade in the Water," "Strange Fruit" and others. It will also feature two original compositions. The album celebrates the beauty that can be found in Black culture.

**Isaiah Armstrong** | *What remains in the gaps*

Armstrong's father, a firefighter, lost his life in the line of duty on March 21st, 2003. By using this personal touchpoint of loss, the artist seeks to revisit and hold space for what has grown in his father's absence by photographing the candid moments of work (on self, in community, in the home) that keep his memory alive in the lives of the ones he was close to.

**Kevin Auzenne** | *Illuminated*

"Illuminated" is a new painting project inspired by the use of biased literacy tests given by southern officials to impede free and fair elections during the civil rights era of the 1960's. This new series will present a painted version of the 'correct' answers to these pernicious test questions, in the style of medieval illuminated books, which themselves were the province of the wealthy and powerful.

**Karla Batres Gilvin** | *Breaking Truths*

"Discover Breaking Truths" is an immersive exhibit featuring seven unique piñatas, each addressing vital socio-political issues like health, race, and immigration. The project also includes a public breaking ceremony where spectators can engage with these striking sculptures, symbolizing the need to dismantle systemic barriers. The ceremony will include live music, refreshments, and meaningful discussions to reflect on shared stories and aspirations for equity.

**Michael Coppage** | *"DROP YOUR WEAPON!" from the 12 Commandments series*

A series of hyper-realistic sculptures about the real fear Black Americans have of dying at the hands of police, police overreach, and abuse of power. The series highlights how even during times of compliance, these commands end in the death of Black individuals. This project is not meant to demonize law enforcement and will not include any visual elements that demean, undermine or negatively present the police department. Coppage hopes to create space for conversations related to the realities of Black American life while creating a model for care and compassion for law enforcement.

**Ximena Flores** | *Resilient Roots: Incan Beliefs and the Beauty of Nature's Endless Flow in the Eternal Cycle of Life and Death.*

"Resilient Roots" is an art exhibition exploring Incan beliefs about life, death, and the endless flow of nature. Using natural materials like dried flowers and fibers, I create immersive and interactive artworks that celebrate life's eternal cycle. Inspired by the Incan reverence for nature, the pieces reflect harmony and respect for the Earth. This exhibition honors Flores' Latin American heritage and invites viewers to engage with themes of resilience, renewal, and interconnectedness, sparking dialogue on cultural identity, sustainability, and the cyclical nature of existence.

**Emily Hanako Momohara** | *Grounded*

"Grounded," started in the wake of the Atlanta Spa shootings, is a portrait project uplifting the immigration journey of Asian American and Pacific Islander families (AAPI) and the womxn who are the backbone of our communities. Large-scale imagery,

photographs, and elements from the landscape create a connection between AAPI womxn and the places that shape us as Americans.

**Brandon Hawkins** | *Out of the Shadows: Celebrating the Black Autism Community Creatively*

For too long, Black children with Autism have faced unique challenges and isolation. Local Artist & Muralist Brandon Hawkins, non-profit organization-Our Tribe, and resourceful community partners will create a powerful mural project with the Black Autism Community in Cincinnati. Young artists will learn valuable skills, design a mural, and boldly share their stories with the world. The project aims to break down stereotypes, foster inclusion, and celebrate the incredible talents of our community.

**Jeni Jenkins** | *Here in The Middle: Colors of colorism, bodies in margins*

This socially engaged art project aims to illuminate the experiences of mixed-race women through community workshops, interviews, and photoshoots. By collaborating with this dynamic community, the project will explore multicultural identities and concepts of belonging and acceptance through a decolonizing, anti-racist feminist lens. It seeks to deepen our understanding of power dynamics and facilitate transformative dialogue. Culminating in a multifaceted exhibition featuring audio, photography, and painting, it will create a rich storytelling experience that amplifies the resilience and narratives of these women while including Jenkins' personal journey, fostering connection and understanding within and beyond our communities.

**Jay Kalagayan** | *Vincent Manago Hambricht: Filipino American Boxer*

Vincent Manago Hambricht, a Filipino American boxer, soldier, and victim of racial violence, is brought to life in a graphic comic book and art exhibit. This project explores his life, from his boxing career in the 1920s to his tragic death in 1946. Through this work, the artist aims to shed light on the often-overlooked contributions of Asian Americans and Filipino Americans to the Midwest, particularly in sports and the community.

**Jonh Lanzador** | *Not a Mail-Order*

In this series of 7-10 photographs, Lanzador delves into the intimate moments shared between white and Asian couples, challenging the narrative that often reduces mixed-race relationships to stereotypes like mail-order brides. The goal is to encourage viewers to see the beauty and complexity of love beyond preconceived judgments, fostering understanding and appreciation for diverse partnerships. Through each photograph, the audience is invited to recognize the individuality of each couple and to celebrate their unique stories without bias.

**Ciara LeRoy** | *For Your Convenience*

"For Your Convenience" will use paintings, sculpture, and advertisement-like visuals to create an immersive "shopping" experience that mimics a convenience store trip, but the products are deeper than they appear at first glance. The project will show how liberation is often very inconvenient while we as Americans love convenience. Convenience keeps many populations on the margins and in positions of subjugation and suffering.

**Noel Bassam Mohammad Maghathe** | *Over Everything*

“Over Everything” explores Maghathe’s personal and shared experiences of displacement, grief, and resilience in Palestine. Using family archives and new photographs intertwined, the artist will navigate the impossibility of returning home and the struggle to preserve memory across distance and time. By layering transparent fabric photographs, Maghathe reflects on the ephemeral nature of memory and cultural identity, grappling with loss and a deep longing to return to Palestine. This May, this work will be shown at SawtoothGallery in Tasmania.

**Lisa Merida-Paytes** | *The Halos Project*

“The Halos Project” seeks to develop new concepts using traditional Hispanic weaving techniques with sustainable materials to create two collaborative installations abstractly investigating themes of redefining, repurposing and generational dysfunction of genes and systems communicating with the whole body. The work drives examination and permits curiosity uncovering aspects of human nature and wonder of origin. As a Hispanic artist living with disabilities caused by Spinocerebellar Ataxia 5, Merida-Paytes understands transformative, physical changes that result from progressive, neurological diseases and hopes to generate an awareness of ways in which bodies are impacted by disabilities.

**Julia O. Bianco** | *Juntas*

Artist and ecologist Julia Orquera Bianco will engage with the Latinx/immigrant women, survivors of domestic violence, at local nonprofit Casa de Paz. For six weeks, Bianco will facilitate workshops on mindfulness practices, artmaking, and nature connection for this community in need of mental and emotional health support. This will culminate in a small publication and an art showcase at The Welcome Project. Bianco will create a body of watercolors, cyanotype and text work, to be exhibited at the artist showcase in July 2025.

**Sherman Parnell** | *New Mission*

Over five months, this project will focus on developing advanced painting skills, navigating grant writing, and exploring the business side of art. Artists will produce individual and collaborative works through a “factory-style” approach, building large-scale pieces and preparing for an exhibition. This project is all about creating sustainable art careers, celebrating diversity, and showcasing powerful new work in our community.

**Brian Taylor** | *Magia Circumcirca Liberationem*

Part one of “Magia Circumcirca Liberationem” (Magic Amid Liberation) is a multidisciplinary project aimed at drawing attention to Radical Reconstruction — an important historical period in the United States in the fight against racism and exploitation. Using science fiction, fantasy and ancient mythology Taylor writes short historical fiction excerpts and creates metal-based artifacts (storied to be made by gods, magical and/or futuristic beings) designed to aid the struggles of the downtrodden.