

Media Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 22, 2016

Edmonton Arts Council recognizes outstanding local artists

Tonight the Edmonton Arts Council will recognize the work of our recently retired Executive Director, Paul Moulton, and the 2015 recipients of the **Cultural Diversity in the Arts** project grants and the **Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund** awards.

Councillors Ben Henderson, Scott McKeen and Mike Nickel will bring greetings on behalf of the City of Edmonton, Carol Watson, Communications Director of the Edmonton Community Foundation, will present awards, and MLA David Shepherd will bring greetings on behalf of the Province of Alberta. The evening will be filled with music from Nuela Charles, Gautam Karnik and Fernando Munoz.

Two short films by Jason Gondziola, of mtset productions, highlighting the award and grant recipients will be screened at the event. The videos will be released at 6:00 p.m. MST on the Edmonton Arts Council's Facebook page. **Contact the Edmonton Arts Council if you would like an embargoed preview of these shorts.**

When: February 22, 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. (presentation to take place 7:00 to 7:30 p.m.)
What: Awards presentation and reception, media photo opportunity
Where: Mercury Room (10575 - 114 Street NW)

"We are so pleased to support and celebrate these eighteen talented Edmontonians" said Anne Ferguson-Stwitzer, Board Chair of the Edmonton Arts Council. "I'm astounded at the range and diversity of this year's recipients, and look forward to the projects and performances that will result from the investments made tonight."

The City of Edmonton through the Edmonton Arts Council established the **Cultural Diversity in the Arts program** to recognize that artists from all parts of the world enrich Edmonton's cultural scene. Artists from these communities can apply to any Edmonton Arts Council program, but many also face cultural, linguistic or historical barriers to accessing support. Grants will support the activities of individual, Edmonton artists for a specific time towards a specific project.

The **Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund** provides awards of \$7,500 to encourage artists to stay in our community. The funds are intended to offset living and working expenses, allowing artists to devote a concentrated period of time to their artistic activities, career enhancement and/or development. The award is available to artists at any stage of their professional career.

More information about the Edmonton Arts Council's grants and award programs can be found at: grants.edmontonarts.ca

Backgrounder: 2015 Cultural Diversity in the Arts and Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund recipients

Recipients of the 2015 Cultural Diversity in the Arts program:

Malcolm Azania, AKA Minister Faust, is best known as an award-winning author of contemporary science fiction and fantasy. His current project is a 200-page haunting, elegiac novel about John Ware, Canada's first cowboy and African-Albertan legend.

Shreela Chakrabarty is a filmmaker passionate about showcasing South Asian culture in Canada. Her current film project highlights the story of the Hindu monk, Swami Vivekananda, on his way to give his hallmark speech at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893.

Growing up in Mexico, **Rubén Contreras** uses his films to advocate. His current project captures the healing stories of former Edmonton sex workers to inspire public awareness, dialogue and empowerment.

Yong Fei Guan is a painter, illustrator and master composter who is finalizing the creation of a picture book about composting. Fei's book will help familiarize young children with the concept of worm composting and reducing household waste.

Todd Houseman, a performer and Aboriginal Peoples Interpreter, along with **Ben Gorodetsky**, a first generation Russian-Canadian theatre artist, make up improv duo Folk Lordz. The duo will be furthering the development of Folk Lordz with research into Cree/Blackfoot war stories and Ashkenazi Jewish shtetl stories.

A PhD. student in Ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta, **Shumaila Hemani** will explore the traditional musical styles of Khayal, Kafi and Waee to produce an album and perform her pieces in concert. She will be one of the first Pakistani women to perform many of these styles on stage.

Born in El Salvador, **Juan Lopezdabdoub** moved to Canada in 1991 leaving a Salvadorean civil war behind. Describing himself as a visual storyteller, Lopezdabdoub's work highlights political, social and philosophical subjects. Lopezdabdoub will be exploring the concept of emotional baggage in his latest painting and video project.

Emmanuel Osahor moved to Edmonton from Nigeria to pursue a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Alberta, where he was recognized with a BMO 1st Art! Award. Drawing from his personal history, Osahor will be documenting the newcomer settlement experience in Edmonton through photography.

Elsa Robinson has a strong connection to her Jamaican heritage. Robinson practices as a professional artist and teaches workshops for children and adults. Her new body of work will reflect on how people transition from different emotional, spiritual or physical places.

Amena Shehab found a career as a stage manager and producer for theatre and television in Syria and Qatar before the changing political environment prompted a move to Canada. Together with Mieko Ouchi, Shehab is developing a one-woman play to share the story of a Syrian girl's journey to a new life.

Recipients of the 2015 Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund:

Malcolm Azania, AKA Minister Faust, is an award-winning author who engages in the community to promote the literary arts. During his time as the University of Alberta's Writer-in-Residence, Azania reached out to diverse communities on campus and across Edmonton, and initiated the Authorpalooza series.

An accomplished musician **Thom Bennett** is an integral part of Edmonton's arts community. Bennett not only contributes to our music scene as a performer but is also a recording engineer, producer, composer, and instructor. He recently set up the Edmonton Live Music Initiative to strengthen the community.

Raylene Campbell is an accordionist, improviser, composer, performance artist, audio/video artist, sound designer, and Deep Listening instructor. She has a Master of Fine Arts degree from Bard College in New York with a two-decade history of professional performance and gallery presentation internationally.

Curtis Gillespie is invested in Edmonton's cultural vitality. He is a teacher, mentor, author, co-founder of the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts, former president of LitFest, and founder of Edmonton's newest narrative journalism magazine *Eighteen Bridges*.

Ainsley Hillyard is a riveting performer and a vibrant member of Edmonton's dance community. A founding member of Good Women Dance, Hillyard creates and performs works for local companies as well as connecting to the public with her classes and mentorship of Victoria High School dance students.

A dancer and enthusiastic collaborator, **Gerry Morita** has led Mile Zero Dance as Artistic Director for the past ten years. She tirelessly promotes contemporary dance locally, nationally and internationally. In our local community Morita mentors artists and students in the development of their artistic voice in movement.

Jana O'Connor is a confident woman who views the world through a comedic lens, and who values the arts as a tool to shine a light on current issues, and to inspire social change. Jana's career has evolved from a theatre and improv performer to that of playwright. She continues to be rooted and devoted to Edmonton's theatre community.

For over a decade **Matthew Wood AKA CREEAZN** has been empowering youth using music and dance. Wood combines hip-hop with traditional Indigenous art to guide the students he works with in self-expression, healing and cultural discovery. He is a prominent member of the Edmonton's hip-hop community and the founder of Cypher Wild YEG on Churchill Square.

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The Edmonton Arts Council is a non-profit society and charitable organization that supports and promotes the arts community in Edmonton. The EAC works to increase the profile and involvement of arts and culture in all aspects of our community life.

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