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From the San Francisco Business Times:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/news/2022/04/27/kenneth-rainin-foundation-fellowship-grant-artists.html>

## Oakland nonprofit unveils its 2022 artist fellowship recipients

Apr 27, 2022, 8:08am PDT

The Kenneth Rainin Foundation announced Wednesday the recipients of this year's fellowship which awards unrestricted grants of \$100,000 to Bay Area artists. The awards, administered by United States Artists, are allocated to four local artists and — in addition to the funds — include support for marketing, financial and legal advice, graphic design and website development and even child care.

The Rainin Fellowship launched last March in response to the increasing squeeze on local artists — high housing costs, gentrification, the precarious working condition of moving from grant to grant without a stable income — factors that were only exacerbated by the pandemic. It is piloted for three years with a potential to extend beyond 2023.

It's specifically tailored to Bay Area artists. Rainin Foundation is focused on what it identifies as "anchor artists," which they define



SCOTT TSUCHITANI

The NAKA Dance Theater is one of four Kenneth Rainin Foundation 2022 artist fellowship recipients.

as someone who works to preserve and innovate new forms of creative expression within their home communities. A team of jurors at the foundation seeks out these “anchor artists” and chooses four across four different disciplines (theater, public space, dance and film) to support a large scope of the vibrant artistic community.

This year, the four Rainin Fellows are: Grammy-nominated artist and activist, Ryan Nicole Austin (theater); interdisciplinary artist and educator, Brett Cook (public space); socially engaged dance theater collective, NAKA Dance Theater (Dance) and film writer and director, Maria Victoria Ponce (Film).

“We are thrilled to announce the second cohort of Rainin Fellows. As anchor artists, these fellows and their creative practices speak to both the rich history and bright future of the Bay Area arts ecosystem.” said Ted Russell, director of arts strategy and ventures at the Kenneth Rainin Foundation in a statement. “It is an honor to celebrate these talented artists, their significant contributions to our community, and the enrichment of the ecosystem in the process.”

Since the funds are unrestricted, the recipients can use them for anything from conceptualizing a new project to operating costs. Finding funding to keep the lights on isn’t glamorous and most donors to the arts prefer contributing to a new building or public programming.

Most of the artists who are awarded are doing programs in the community space and are finding new ways to use the funds to branch out and connect with other organizations and artists. Oakland-based People’s Kitchen Collective was in the Rainin Fellowship inaugural class last year and hosted community meals in the tradition of the Black Panther Party Free Breakfast Program. These sorts of gestures at the intersection of art and activism echoes the ethos of the fellowship.

This sort of direct and unconstrained funding is so vital — especially if the Bay Area is to retain its emerging artist talent. “Growing up poor and undocumented in Richmond, California, I never imagined a career in the arts. The Rainin Grant allows me to pursue not just that, but something bigger, more complete in

scope. It frees me to think more about the world I'm creating and expands the possibilities for my characters and their journeys. I can finally truly tell my stories," said 2022 Rainin Fellow Maria Victoria Ponce.

The Oakland-based nonprofit to date has awarded over \$45 million to Bay Area arts organizations across various disciplines including theater, public space, dance and film. The funding is from private foundation sources.

**Diana K. Murphy**

Special Projects Editor

*San Francisco Business Times*

