

MISSION

3Arts is a nonprofit organization that advocates for Chicago's women artists, artists of color, and artists with disabilities who work in the performing, teaching, and visual arts. By providing unrestricted cash awards, project funding, residency fellowships, professional development, and promotion, 3Arts helps artists take risks, experiment, and focus on their creative process.

3ARTS AWARDS PROGRAM

Each year, as the result of a nomination-and-jury selection process, we distribute \$15,000 unrestricted awards to 15 artists, two each in dance, music, teaching arts, theater, and visual arts. Our no-strings-attached awards and companion programming reflect our commitment to supporting both the human needs and the careers of individual artists.

The cash award is the entry point for subsequent residency fellowships, project support, promotion, and informal and formal professional development that we offer to our current and past awardees on an ongoing basis, as follows:

- **A NATIONAL NETWORK OF 3ARTS RESIDENCY FELLOWSHIPS**
Our awardees may apply for 3Arts Residency Fellowships in a national network of residency programs. The fellowships include month-long residencies, \$2,000 stipends, and airfare. Artists who receive a fellowship are eligible to apply again in three years. This program is managed independently by the Alliance of Artists Communities and our residency partners: Djerassi Resident Artists Program, Ragdale Foundation, The Rauschenberg Residency, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. In establishing this network, we sought out artist communities that are accessible and that welcome artists working in the disciplines our organization supports.
- **3AP PROJECT SUPPORT AND TRAINING**
3Arts awardees may seek project support every year through 3AP (3Arts Artist Projects), an online crowdfunding initiative. Awardees work with us to develop and post projects on the home page of our website, and we jointly seek pledges from our collective networks. What distinguishes this program from others is threefold: 3Arts contributes 1/3 of the funding goal, we do not charge service fees to our artists, and we attach a professional development program to help our awardees learn lasting and translatable skills. All contributions through 3AP are tax deductible and every dollar contributed goes to the artists.

Because 3AP involves artists using communication, marketing, social media, and technology, 3Arts provides workshops, mentorship, technical support, and a step-by-step handbook to help them learn the skills they need to get their projects funded and gain traction in their careers. To date, 3AP has a 100% success rate, with all posted projects reaching their funding goals.

- **ANNUAL FINANCIAL PLANNING WORKSHOPS**

Each award comes with a formal workshop to help awardees understand how to manage the influx of grant money, and our staff is available for more tailored meetings with artists as needed. In 2014, the financial planning workshop will be led by Creative Capital artists through their Professional Development Program.

- **PROMOTION**

Each 3Arts awardee is given an online gallery on our website and provided back-end access to update the site as needed. Further, we feature the work of our awardees at our events, in e-blasts, advertising, and on our Facebook page on a regular basis.

AWARDS SELECTION PROCESS

TIMELINE

- January-February Nominators are selected
- January-March Judges are selected
- March 1 Nominator instructions are emailed
- April 1 Nominations are due
- April 10 Application letters with login information are sent to nominees
- May 30 Artist application deadline
- June 10 Judges are sent login information to access applications online
- July Five daylong jury panels convene to select the awardees
- August All artists and nominators are notified
- September Videotaping of awardees for presentation at awards event
- October 3Arts Awards event

NOMINATORS AND THE NOMINATION PROCESS

More than 100 artists are nominated each year by 35 anonymous nominators—seven in each of the five disciplines we support. Because nominators have to choose three artists over many others they know, 3Arts protects their privacy—although nominators may certainly reveal themselves as they see fit.

The nominators are Chicago artists, arts advocates, curators, and presenters who are acutely aware of artists working in a wide variety of communities in the greater metropolitan area. The executive director, whose job it is to be actively engaged in the local arts sector, selects the nominators each year. The majority of the nominators reflect the artists that we

serve and are also women, people of color, and people with disabilities. One past 3Arts awardee may serve as a nominator in each discipline. The pool of nominators changes each year to ensure that an equally wide pool of artists is reached.

Nominators look for:

- Artists whose work evinces a distinctive artistic voice and technical acumen
- People for whom both recognition and \$15,000 would have a significant impact
- Artists who have not received abundant or major monetary awards
- Women, people of color, and/or people with disabilities only
- Current residents of the Chicago Metropolitan area (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, McHenry, Lake, and Will counties) who have been residents for at least the past twelve months
- U.S. citizens or holders of permanent resident alien status
- Artists who are not enrolled in a degree program

A Few Thoughts

Age is not a factor. Nominees may just be starting out in their careers—UfY at a critical juncture in their practice—or have worked in their field for decades. This is an opportunity to nominate artists who are ready to be acknowledged, whose work could use the boost of recognition, or whose work has gone under-recognized. Someone who already has a national profile, a highly visible and awarded practice, or for whom \$15,000 would not have a major impact, will not necessarily reap the full benefits of a 3Arts Award.

The first criterion given to nominators is to identify artists who have a distinctive artistic voice and acumen—a clearly subjective notion. What makes one artist’s work resonate with a particular nominator may not have the same impact on another nominator. We do not attempt to limit the nominators because we are eager to reach artists of all kinds, including those who are not supported in the mainstream and are less likely to be awarded grants.

An important step after the nominations are in hand is that we double-check every nominee’s eligibility by conducting straightforward Internet searches. Every now and then we find a nominee who no longer lives in the region we serve, for example. By striving to discover ineligibility before notifying artists that they have been nominated, we hope to avoid disappointing them.

While all we ask of nominators is that they submit accurate contact information for their nominees, providing this can still be challenging. When incomplete information is submitted, we ask the nominators to dig deeper to locate the contact information. If we don’t have correct contact information, we have no way of contacting the nominated artists. In case we are given an incorrect email address, we send the application information through the regular mail and via email. It is often the case that an artist has a different email address than the one we are given and the paper letter is the failsafe mechanism for that inevitability.

ARTIST APPLICATION PROCESS

The letter we send to the nominees to let them know they have been nominated includes a login link for access to our online application. The first step in the online process requires artists to create a new password and update their contact information. They are then prompted to respond in the affirmative to a short list of eligibility requirements to indicate that they are indeed eligible for the award. We don't want any artists to go through the application process only to discover that they are not eligible. If they indicate that they are not eligible, we can see that onscreen through the administrative dashboard of the application system, and we reach out to the artists to talk through their situation and make sure they have responded correctly on the form.

Once on the system, artists are invited to answer three narrative questions with up to 500-word answers that allow them to discuss what's most important to them about their art, what has shaped and continues to shape their lives, and what their plans for the future are. The questions are straightforward and seem easy to answer, but there is a complexity to their open-endedness that prompts artists to think carefully about their best approach. Our application system includes some tips to help them think through this. Artists are also asked to upload their résumés and indicate any awards they have received in the past. (Over the years, judges have requested these latter inclusions.) The final step is the uploading of work samples—video clips, still imagery, audio, and documents—depending upon their art forms. Teaching artists have the added step of uploading a letter of support from a collaborating partner.

A Few Thoughts

Our online application is designed to be somewhat interactive. Artists may reach technical support or the executive director with questions via email through each step. And the staff can make changes immediately. For example, if an artist has been nominated as an instrumentalist, but wants to be considered as a composer, we are able to switch categories and quickly provide a new login link for the correct application. (By the way, the delineation offered in the above example is not strict: We recognize that many artists are equal parts instrumentalist and composer, or dancer and choreographer, etc. We ask them to indicate a particular form to help them focus their work samples accordingly.)

The application system has built-in reminders that are sent periodically and encourage artists not to wait until the last moment to upload work samples. Our system is shut down at 5:00 p.m. on the deadline date, and no late applications are accepted. On the administrative dashboard, we are able to monitor, in real time, the progress of the applications and communicate with artists who may need technical assistance.

One of the most satisfying aspects of the application process is the number of notes we receive from artists about the value of the experience of writing about their work and the boost the recognition of being nominated gives them. This is particularly true of artists who have never applied for a grant or award. We have begun to notice that some artists cite their nomination for a 3Arts Award on their résumés. Most of them want to know who nominated them. We offer to pass along thank you notes, but we do not tell them who their nominator was.

SELECTING JUDGES AND THE PANEL PROCESS

Five discipline-based panels each consist of three judges select the award recipients—two in each discipline. Each panel consists of one local and two out-of-state judges who convene in Chicago to make their selections. By engaging out-of-state judges, our intention is twofold: We want to introduce arts leaders from all over the country to Chicago artists and we want to avoid the biases that can inadvertently occur when panelists intimately know the artists they are charged with reviewing. This is not by any means a perfect system, but we have found that judges from elsewhere bring fresh perspectives to the panels and most often do not know our local artists.

The executive director scouts for judges year round and maintains a research file with prospective judges and their bios. Those who have already served in that capacity for 3Arts recommend prospective judges. Each year, we look for judges who have a deep understanding of their art forms and also a magnanimous and broad understanding of the many genres that comprise the form. In music this is particularly important, as our nominees span rock, folk, classical, jazz, etc., and judges must be open to all of those styles. We also look for geographic diversity when selecting judges, as another way to engage as many perspectives as possible. The judges' photographs and bios are posted on our website.

In addition to awardees, judges may also select honorable mentions. We do not reveal the names of the honorable mentions because they are automatically invited to apply the following year, and we do not wish to bias the next panel of judges in any way.

3Arts requires judges to disclose conflicts of interest as part of the award selection process. If a strong personal or professional relationship exists between a judge and a nominated artist that might impair the judge's ability to be a neutral evaluator of the work samples, the judge may not participate in the discussion or the vote related to that artist's application. Further, all panels are considered confidential and we do not share the judges' commentary in our feedback sessions (see [“Notifying Artists and Nominators”](#) section, below) unless they request that we do so.

Judges access the online applications and read them before the panels take place. They do not have prior access to the work samples, but experience the work together in Chicago. This is a somewhat unusual system, but it's one that we found works well for us and helps to avoid the preconceptions that can be a part of selection processes. Bar none, past judges have told us that they appreciate the engagement they have with each other and the ensuing debates as they are introduced to the work together.

The first round of consideration is a silent round during which the judges look at or listen to all of the work samples. We ask them to indicate whether the artist in question should be considered further, by checking “yes,” “no,” or “revisit” on a form we provide them. The forms are collected and tallied during a break and we move on to a conversational round two in which the judges confirm the artists who will be moving forward. It is common that a consensus begins to form even in the first round. As the day unfolds, the judges dig more deeply into the work and the narrative applications until there are clear finalists and, ultimately, awardees.

A Few Thoughts

The role of the executive director is to facilitate the conversations and help to preserve the integrity of the process. The staff does not vote or have a say in who is selected. Instead, we are tasked with answering policy questions, clarifying the process, grounding the conversations in the mission of 3Arts, and helping the judges move past any hurdles they might have by asking questions and encouraging conversation.

3Arts is very interested in supporting artists whose work may not fit into prevalent trends or may fall outside of the mainstream, is risk-taking in some way, and/or is at an interesting juncture. We encourage judges to consider the person along with the art. Whether an artist is 80 or 20 years old, these factors are important to us.

At the end of each panel, we talk about the process and ask for feedback from the judges about what we might improve. These conversations have helped us refine our system each year.

NOTIFYING ARTISTS AND NOMINATORS

The executive director notifies each new awardee by phone. This is, without a doubt, the most memorable and remarkable aspect of the selection process. Because the call usually delivers quite a shock, we follow up immediately with a letter that includes important details about the award, including the date of the public awards celebration, the first lunch gathering of the awardees that takes place soon afterward, and the financial workshop where they will learn how to manage their grant income.

Letters are simultaneously sent to the artists who did not receive the awards and to the artists who received honorable mentions who will be in the pool the following year. We also email all of the nominators to let them know whether or not their artists were selected.

Finally, we offer to meet with any artist who would like feedback, and roughly 15-20 such meetings take place in the months after the selection process concludes. In these meetings, the executive director provides input on all aspects of the application (while upholding the confidentiality of the judges' remarks) and directs artists to other grant opportunities and resources. In many cases, artists who go through this feedback process apply to—and are awarded—grant, residency, and/or professional development opportunities elsewhere.

About two months after the 3Arts Awards program concludes, a new cycle starts up again.



180 N. Michigan Avenue, #305
Chicago, IL 60601
312.443.9621
3arts.org