

2018 Artist Research and Development Grant Awards

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Sama Alshaibi

City/Town: Tucson, Arizona

Discipline: Visual Arts

Sama Alshaibi's photography, videos, and installations explore spaces of conflict and the human struggles that arise in the aftermath of war and exile. Born in Basra, Iraq in 1973 to an Iraqi father and Palestinian mother, Alshaibi draws from her experiences as a political refugee and now a naturalized U.S. citizen by using her own body as an allegorical site to make the byproducts of conflict visible.

Her proposed project "Carry Over" will consist of two elements: sixteen photographic gum-prints (a historical, non-silver printing process the artist will employ to evoke colonial photographs of Middle Eastern women as supposed characterizations of the region) and 8 constructed sculptural headdresses, echoing historical pictures of women of the region carrying vessels of bread and water on their heads and contemporary images suggesting a chaotic existence under threat of displacement. The headdresses will be worn by the artist in the photographs and displayed alongside the photographs in future exhibitions. Through this work, the artist aims to resist superficial analysis that reduces Middle Eastern women's rights and opportunities to what they wear, which keeps them affixed to assumed subordinate positions in the imagination of others.

Alshaibi is Professor and Co-Chair of Photography at University of Arizona, Tucson, where she was granted the title as "1885 Distinguished Scholar". Her work has been featured in *Focal Plane*, *Photo District News*, *L'Oile de la Photographie*, *Lensculture*, *NY Times*, *Ibraaz*, *Bluin Artinfo*, *Contact Sheet*, *Contemporary Practices*, *Harpar's Bazaar*, *The Guardian*, *CNN*, *Huffington Post* and *Hysteria*. Her public collections include Houston Museum of Fine Art, Lightwork, Barjeel Art Foundation, Nadour Collection, En Foco Collection, Khaled Shoman Collection, Salsali Museum and the Museum of Tunisia.

María Isabel Alvarez

City/Town: Chandler, Arizona

Discipline: Literary Arts

An immigrant of Guatemala, María Isabel Alvarez sees her life in Arizona as "one of duality where I am neither fully American nor fully Guatemalan, but a melding of the two." In writing short stories, flash fiction, and now a novel-in-progress, Alvarez aims to narrow the gap between these two worlds.

Her Research & Development Grant will support research toward the writing of *The Quiet Yellowing of Birds*, a magical realist novel set in both Guatemala and Arizona. Written in two parts, one representing the country the author left behind and the other speaking to the experience of Guatemalan immigrants in the United States, the book will explore wifhood, motherhood, and femininity as embodied by Guatemalan immigrant women.

Born in Guatemala and raised in Arizona, Alvarez graduated from the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program at Arizona State University, where she taught fiction workshops and received a Graduate Excellence Award, an MFA Writing Scholarship, a University Travel Grant to present an academic paper at the 14th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities, and several University Graduate Fellowships. Her fiction has been published in *Black Warrior Review*, *Sonora Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Arts & Letters*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Columbia Journal*, and elsewhere.

William Ambrose

City/Town: Flagstaff, Arizona

Discipline: Visual Arts

With his Research & Development Grant, William Ambrose will complete a six-year, three stage painting series focused on the "intimate trauma of Alzheimer's disease." Stage Three explores the effects of Alzheimer's through a metaphor of plant life, the disease represented as a thing that grows in the mind, irreversibly absorbing cognitive functions, branching out slowly and steadily over time.

The first stage of the project comprises paintings of plants of all sizes, shapes, colors. The second stage is performative: Ambrose acts as the disease, culling specific paintings he has produced during his time in Arizona—representative of specific memories, friends, and loved ones—and painting over them, completely covering the original works with newly painted plants—an imitation of the way that Alzheimer's eclipses memories of previous life. In the third and final stage of the project, Ambrose will produce paintings of his grandparents' home. As both are now in memory care units, their home has fallen into disrepair. The paintings produced in stage three will document the transformation of the home as it becomes hidden under a tangle of plant life, wild bushes, and weeds.

William Ambrose is an artist whose practice covers ideas of repetition and identity, memory and personal history. He has shown in New York, Los Angeles, Minneapolis and Flagstaff and is collected internationally. He obtained his Bachelor of Liberal Arts from Sarah Lawrence College as well as additional study at the College of Queen Mary: University of London. A founding member of the Museum of Contemporary Art Flagstaff, Ambrose has lived and worked in Flagstaff, Arizona since 2010.

Torran Anderson

City/Town: Tucson, Arizona

Discipline: Multidisciplinary Arts

From 1942-1946 over 13,000 Japanese Americans were held in Gila River Internment Camp. Born and raised in Tucson, Torran Anderson was surprised to learn about this chapter of the state's history, and more so by the fact that he hadn't heard of it in his youth. An author of children's books, apps, and digital educational resources, Anderson received funding in support of research that will inform an expansive, multimedia community storytelling and oral history project. To aid in his research and story gathering efforts, Anderson has enlisted Dr. Terry Lee, whose own "Wisdom of Age" video project documents the stories of the elderly, as a collaborator.

Under Lee's guidance, Anderson will interview Japanese Americans who were held in Gila River and record their first-person oral histories of the experience. Anderson will then develop an online resource of recorded interviews, photos, and primary source documents.

"My hope is that it provides a way for literary artists to look at storytelling and history from multiple perspectives and that it can engage the broader community in a story of the past that is relevant today," said Anderson in his application.

Torran Anderson has published over fifty children's books in a wide range of formats including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and comics. Torran currently works at the Environmental Education Exchange doing presentations and education program development, searching for creative ways to make learning hands on and fun. In 2017, he developed the Riders & Walkers multi-media game for Living Streets Alliance to teach about bike and pedestrian safety. With support from the Arizona Commission on the Arts Professional Development Grant, Torran was the 33rd bridge guard at the Bridge Guard Residency in Sturovo, Slovakia where he worked on a community art project called, "Remembering the River."

Clarice Bales

City/Town: Tucson, Arizona

Discipline: Digital Media arts

Since graduating from Northern Arizona University with a Bachelor of Science in Electronic Media and Film in 2015, Tucson filmmaker Clarice Bales has primarily worked on documentary films. Her Artist research and Development Grant will support the production of a short narrative film, a work of fiction that is no less rooted in real world issues and the filmmakers personal struggles.

Shot in Tombstone and Bisbee, “La motochorra” tells the story of Liz, a young queer woman who has never left her hometown. The town, a struggling former-mining community full of crumbling buildings, reflects the film's central narrative of depression and forgotten dreams. Through Liz's journey, however, a spark of hope is introduced, a demonstration of how the cycle of depression can start to be broken by small steps towards change.

Through “La motochorra” Bales aims to offer a positive representation of queer people, particularly queer people of color, depicting them as complex, three dimensional human beings. She hopes the film will reach diverse audiences, spark discussion, and increase awareness about depression and other challenges commonly faced by members of the LGBTQ community, breaking stereotypes and increasing the community's visibility.

To help tell her story, Bales has assembled a team of talented local artists and technicians. Kelly Ramirez and Gia Gerardo will play the lead characters Liz and Soledad, while Fausto Olmos will play the role of Liz’s father. She will work closely with cinematographer Cooper James on shot composition and lighting for the film. Other crew members include Rogelio Camarillo, Marcos Vidal, Emily Belleranti, and Sara Luu. An original score will be provided by Tucsonan band Juju Fontaine

Christine Cassano

City/Town: Phoenix, Arizona

Discipline: Visual Arts

Christine Cassano is a full-time artist based in Phoenix. Her fossil-like sculptures use elements of the biological and the technological to explore contemporary ecological challenges and the idea of "a future imperfect." Her sculptures are both visually active and metaphorically rich with meaning. Her intention is to engage the public in a dialogue about the intersection of ecological, biological, and technological narratives in society and their impact on the world around us.

With her award, Cassano will focus on expanding her knowledge and understanding of sculpture-related materials, technologies, and casting processes. During this period of learning and exploration, she will push the boundaries of her previous sculptural work into a larger size and scale. In the winter of 2018, Cassano plans to transport one of these new, larger monolithic forms into the remote Sonoran Desert landscape. Over the period of several days, the installation will be documented via time-lapse video, more new territory for the artist to explore.

Cassano received her BFA in Studio Art from Old Dominion University. She exhibits her work locally, regionally and nationally including the Phoenix Art Museum and a solo exhibition at Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum. She is also a Contemporary Forum Artist Grant recipient via the Phoenix Art Museum and supported in part by the Nathan Cummings Foundation Endowment.

Works and installations by Cassano are featured in various collections throughout the US and on the cover of two nationally published books. In addition, new works have been commissioned by a number of developers, architectural firms, universities, and hospitals.

Melanie Channon

City/Town: Phoenix, Arizona

Discipline: Visual Arts

Alongside metalsmith Jewel Clark, Melanie Channon will conduct research on and document fiber techniques that have been, or can be, applied to metals to create works that are functional and durable as well as decorative. Ultimately, Clark and Channon hope to publish a collection of techniques as a supplement to the research documented in Arline Fisch's 1996 book, *Textile Techniques in Metal*. In addition to researching textile weaving techniques that have been successfully translated to metal in the past, but have little to no instructions currently available, the metal artists will identify and explore the potential of several other textile techniques that have not previously been applied to metal.

Melanie Channon did not discover her artistic abilities until after earning a PhD in geochemistry. A passion for metalworking was immediately ignited by a jewelry-making class she took with friends at a Phoenix studio in early 2013. From there she took an introductory metalworking class at ASU and began creating larger, non-functional art pieces. As she was devising a piece that would incorporate metal weaving, she happened upon a poster advertising a past workshop taught by a local master of the technique, Jewel Clark.

This collaboration is serendipitous for both Channon and Clark, but also has the potential to provide an invaluable resource to the greater field of metal artists: Channon will be able to expand and develop her skills under a skilled mentor; Clark will attain an eager apprentice who shares her enthusiasm for researching this niche topic; and the metals community will benefit from the publication of previously unavailable detailed instructions on a variety of obscure techniques.

Marieke Davis

City/Town: Gilbert, Arizona

Discipline: Multidisciplinary Arts

Marieke Davis graduated summa cum laude from Arizona State University in Spring 2017 with a BFA in Art/Drawing, minors in English Literature and Women's & Gender Studies, and a certificate in Creative Writing. She is also visually impaired.

This grant will fund Chapter 2 of Davis's *Ember Black*, a classic hero's journey narrative rooted in the rich traditions of legend and folklore, told in two separate but complementary media: a graphic novel and audio drama. By creating a graphic novel with a strong female protagonist, Davis aims to deliver a compelling, relatable story about a woman's struggles and ultimate empowerment to an audience the comic book industry has historically underserved. By simultaneously crafting the story as a complementary audio drama, Davis invites another underserved audience to participate in the medium of sequential art--those who, like her, have a visual impairment.

Davis presented the first installment of *Ember Black* in both print and audio formats at winner of the Audience Choice Award at her BFA Senior Exhibition, "Tell-Tale Art: An Exhibition of Narrative Art." Her work earned her the Audience Choice Award at first annual Herberger Institute IDEA Showcase. In May 2017, she made her first Phoenix Comicon appearance with her presentation and panel discussion, "Creating *Ember Black*."

Juliana Desmond

City/Town: Tucson, Arizona

Discipline: Multidisciplinary Arts

Though chocolate originated in the region, 70% of the cacao consumed in Mexico today is imported. Through her work, chocolate artist Juliana Desmond aims to inspire no less than a fundamental reimagining of the Mexican cacao market by encouraging collaboration between cacao producers and artists.

A skilled sculptor and ceramicist, Desmond discovered that she could make food-safe silicone molds for giving shape and form to chocolate. Upon further exploration with her new medium, she found a simple, inexpensive piece of equipment for creating thermoformed molds that is small enough to take on the road.

With her Artist Research & Development Grant, Desmond will venture deep into the Mesoamerican birthplace of chocolate with her portable mold-making equipment to research and archive Mayan textile designs in the form of chocolate bars. She'll visit communities particularly noted for their embroidered textiles and interview the weavers to reach an understanding of the symbolism behind each design and the customs that shaped them. Her research will inform not only the chocolate molds, but packaging design, as well, resulting in a marketable and educational product.

Along the way, Desmond aims for a fair exchange of ideas, art, and culture. By sharing her own knowledge and leaving behind innovative, yet simple technologies for mold-making she hopes to help members of the communities she visits create viable and sustainable economic opportunities.

Charles Hedgcock

City/Town: Tucson, Arizona

Discipline: Visual Arts

Tucson's Charles "Chip" Hedgcock was awarded funding to support his work with scientists at Biosphere 2, a research facility located in the Sonoran desert. There he will use a camera-less photographic process known as Lumen prints to create botanical images of a wide range of plant species from the five different biomes within the facility. These images will provide a unique artistic interpretation of the botanical richness, contained within Biosphere 2, and will be presented to school groups, educational programs, visiting researchers, and other visitors to Biosphere 2.

Hedgcock hopes this work will raise public awareness of the diversity of plants from around the globe that Biosphere 2 contains while illuminating scientific research that provides a better understanding of our global environment.

Hedgcock is a Registered Biological Photographer with many years of experience working with scientists both in the laboratory and the field. He has worked as a photographer in medicine, the life sciences, and fine arts to create a unique vision of the natural world. He has a keen personal interest in the natural sciences and has participated in many biological expeditions documenting the biodiversity of unique, seldom explored mountain ranges in the Southwestern US and Northern Mexico. For Hedgcock, working at the Biosphere 2 is an extraordinary opportunity to take his work to the next level artistically, while also serving as a unique and artistic contribution to scientific interpretation.

Eric Johnsen

City/Town: Tucson, Arizona

Discipline: Performing Arts

Eric Johnsen is a Tucson-based composer and producer who endeavors to explore ambiguous musical spaces between jazz and chamber, consonance and dissonance, composition and improvisation. With *Liminality*, a set of musical compositions for an eight-piece improvisational jazz/chamber ensemble and a string orchestra, Johnson hopes to take his explorations to the next level.

Originally used to describe the middle phase in a rite of passage, liminality can be used today to describe any state of transition existing free of conventional structures and boundaries, from a state of mind to a moment in time. With the eight pieces that comprise *Liminality*, Johnson aims to reflect a world in which states of transition are occurring rapidly, on many levels, from the personal to global.

Though combining orchestral elements with jazz improvisation and world music is not new, Johnson believes there yet remains much room to explore the spaces between these contrasting mediums. Past efforts to combine these elements have often resulted in one dominating the other--a jazz group with background strings added for embellishment or an orchestral work containing a brief jazz solo passage for the sake of novelty. *Liminality* seeks to balance these elements as indigenous equals, each having their featured moments, while at times playing off the other as if having an intimate conversation.

To facilitate the creation of the music, Johnson will engage consultants to advise him on matters of playability, phrasing, and notation. These will include string players Jim Karrer, Michael Fan and Joseph Pagan of Tucson Symphony Orchestra, vocalist Katherine Byrnes and guitarist Gus Woodrow. Daniel Dor and Jon Singer, two New York-based percussionists, will assist with the drums and tabla parts. The compositions will be further refined while recording excerpts using pianist Angelo Versace and guitarists Matt Mitchell and Woodrow.

Lawrence Lenhart

City/Town: Flagstaff, Arizona

Discipline: Literary Arts

In his grant application Flagstaff writer Lawrence Lenhart shares an insight from scholar Epeli Hau'ofa that though islands are traditionally perceived as small, isolated, fragmented, and disenfranchised relative to their continental neighbors, "if we look at the myths, legends, and oral traditions, and cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania, it will become evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions. Their universe comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse... it."

Lenhart aims to honor this paradigm shift—from small island to big ocean—through a book-length manuscript of speculative, lyric, and biographical essays and an anthology of contemporary literature from "small island" authors.

For his own work, Lawrence will employ a variety of novel styles and techniques, including the speculative essay, the prospective essay, the apocryphal essay, and the topographical essay, among others. He intends for these various styles to demonstrate the ways in which climate change appropriates island rhythms, idioms, cultures, and the like—a new strategy for telling stories of place in this new epoch.

Through his compiling of contemporary "small island" literature—one piece from each of the 39 islands within the Alliance of Small Island States—Lawrence will provide a complement to his own work while demonstrating the overabundance of cultural life on these islands. This grant will allow him to interview local academics and leaders to find the storytelling voices of countries like Niue (pop. 1,612), Nauru (pop. 10,084), and Tuvalu (pop. 11,097). When possible, he will also record the authors narrating their stories—in English or their native language.

Serge J-F. Levy

City/Town: Tucson, Arizona

Discipline: Visual Arts

Serge J-F. Levy has been making, writing about, and exhibiting street photography for over 20 years. His practice has largely involved working in urban centers throughout the United States, parts of Europe and Japan. For his latest project, supported in part by an Artist Research & Development Grant, Levy champions a new documentary-style approach to the family narrative that moves away from literal imagery to a lyrical and expressionistic style that draws on street photography as well as, landscape, and still life.

Levy describes the project, titled "2900 Miles and Other Jumping Cholla," as a "collection of hidden messages drawn from living 2,900 miles away from my father's decline....Reminders, perhaps an admission to myself, that my father is dying."

When documenting the loss of a loved one, photographers generally favor a traditional documentary-style approach. Being so geographically distant from his father, Levy has adapted his usual approach, trading literal images and logical structure for a more allusive, metaphorical style of picture-making. These images relate a nonlinear narrative and evoke the ambiguous ideas and emotions embedded in moments of daily life.

Levy has exhibited his photography at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Phoenix Museum of Art, Schroeder Romero Gallery in Chelsea, and The Leica Gallery (New York City and Tokyo) among many other national and international solo and group exhibitions. In 2011 Princeton University Press published a book of Levy's photographs made during his yearlong photography fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ. Levy's magazine photography has been featured in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Life*, *ESPN The Magazine*, *Marie Claire*, *Stern*, and *The London Sunday Times Magazine* among others. He currently teaches photography at Tohono O'odham Community College and Pima Community College, and writes book reviews and does portfolio reviews for *LensCulture*.

Laura Maher

City/Town: Tucson, Arizona

Discipline: Literary Arts

Laura Maher's grant will help her complete a series of poems on the themes of chronic illness, health, healthcare policies, and caregiving, as well as the impacts these topics can have on the body and mind, finances, and familial relationships, part of her larger book-length manuscript, *Cure*.

The poems will explore Maher's own experiences, but will also include other first-person narratives gathered from anonymous surveys and research on specific health issues. She will also pull language from the primary healthcare texts of recent memory: the Affordable Care Act, the American Health Care Act, and the Better Care Reconciliation Act. Though the primary texts—and recent conversations around healthcare—are politically charged, the poet aims to deepen the conversation around the human experience of being well or ill instead of adding to any political dialogue on the subject of healthcare.

In the process of working on these poems, Maher will also conduct writing workshops on the subjects of health and illness at community and health centers in Southern Arizona. These workshops will be hands-on, generative courses that will teach students strategies for continuing writing beyond the workshop.

Laura Maher is the author of the chapbook, *Sleep Water* (Dancing Girl Press, 2017). Her poetry has appeared in *Crazyhorse*, *Moonsick Magazine*, *The Collagist*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Third Coast*. Her criticism has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cutbank Online*, *The Bind*, and the radio program *Speedway and Swan with Brian Blanchfield*. A recipient of fellowships from Vermont Studio Center and the Academy of American Poets, she will be teaching a course on the revision process, titled "Revisioning," at the University of Arizona Poetry Center in Fall 2017.

Laurie McKenna

City/Town: McNeal, Arizona

Discipline: Multidisciplinary Arts

With her Artist Research & Development Grant, McNeal-based multidisciplinary artist Laurie McKenna will expand on her performance/video piece, *The Undesirables*, which she describes as "a personal, reflective, funny and tragic series of stories punctuated with biting text projections and videos."

On the morning of July 12th, 1917 in Bisbee, Arizona, two mining companies and the Sheriff armed over a thousand citizens known as the Loyalty League and rounded up 1,196 striking miners at gunpoint, marched them to the baseball park 4 miles away, loaded them onto cattle cars, and banished them to the desert of New Mexico. The workers were accused of being subversive, anti-American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

McKenna began researching this incident in 2014. Since then she has developed a large online community around her investigation and produced various art projects, culminating in the presentation of a work-in-process, multimedia presentation of *The Undesirables* on the 100th anniversary of the incident. Through more research, experimentation, and revisiting her already produced material, McKenna intends to expand the spoken word portion of the performance, create additional video elements, and further refine the overall presentation.

Laurie McKenna is a multidisciplinary artist currently focusing on performance art and video. Often referencing American history, she combines and distills personal experience and bereft and dispossessed cultural narratives. Her research-intensive work tackles issues of labor, race, place, and America's social margins. She holds a BFA in Filmmaking from Mass College of Art. From 2003-2015 she was a member of Central School Project--an Artist Studio Cooperative and Arts Center in Bisbee, Arizona. In 2014 she became its Executive Director.

Angelina Ramirez

City/Town: Phoenix, Arizona

Discipline: Performing Arts

Flamenco began as a product of the Andalusian lower-class but was later embraced by Spain's upper-class, becoming a national symbol. Eventually it was reclaimed as a gitano art form and since then, an idealization notion of puro (pure) flamenco has led many scholars to believe that only gitano dancers, who carry the form in their blood, can fully express the art of flamenco. Through her new performance piece *SER*, Angelina Ramirez explores concerns of identity and embodiment experienced by non-gitano dancer's.

For the past twenty years, Ramirez has strived to present flamenco in the purest way possible, most often performing in traditional, intimate settings with live musicians, known as tablaos. These performances are largely improvised and are considered the most authentic way to present flamenco. *SER* will deepen Ramirez's artistic practice by allowing her to explore a different kind of flamenco production and challenge the boundaries of what is traditionally considered flamenco.

Ramirez began studying Flamenco at the age of nine in Tucson, Arizona. At sixteen, she became a member of Olivia Rojo's company, Flamenco y Más. Just out of high school, Angelina toured the US as a featured artist with the National Theater Company. She continued her studies at the National Institute of Flamenco Arts in Albuquerque, New Mexico with Eva Encinias, Joaquin Encinias, Omayra Amaya and Marisol Encinias. Upon returning to Arizona, Angelina founded Flamenco Por La Vida, a performance company that has been continually performing throughout the Valley for the past eight years and hosts two annual festivals in Phoenix: Lluvia Flamenca and The Phoenix Festival de España. She also tours with world-renowned, New York-based company Noche Flamenca in their production of *Antigone*. Recently, Angelina was one of ten teaching artists to be selected to participate in the inaugural Creative Aging Teaching Artist Institute through the Arizona Commission on the Arts.

Erin Stalcup

City/Town: Flagstaff, Arizona

Discipline: Literary Arts

In her first two books, Flagstaff author Erin Stalcup established herself as a unique voice in speculative fiction with a style *Publisher's Weekly* described as "surreal but solid enough for the reader to lean against." With her new novel, *The Keener*, Stalcup hopes to create something more conventional (and a bit more commercial), but no less personal. *The Keener* imagines that the ancient Irish custom of hiring keening women for funerals never stopped. Her protagonist, Maeve, is paid to mourn strangers, and has become the world's most famous keener. The novel follows her as she publicly performs and also investigates her own private griefs.

Beyond allowing her the opportunity to develop a new style of writing, Stalcup hopes the grant and the work it supports will also further her goals of making space for unconventional, fabulist fiction by women, an environment where it is easier for other unconventional writers to publish their work. As she explains in her application, "I believe diverse voices telling stories is one antidote to the ills of society, and I hope my writing, teaching, and editing can solidify and celebrate diverse communities."

Erin Stalcup is the author of the story collection *And Yet It Moves* (Indiana University Press 2016), and the novel *Every Living Species* (Gold Wake Press 2017). Her fiction has appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Sun*, *Monkeybicycle*, *H_NGM_N*, *Hobart*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and elsewhere, and her nonfiction was named a Notable Essay in Best American Essays 2016. Erin holds an MFA from Warren Wilson's Program for Writers, and has taught in community colleges, universities, liberal arts schools, and prisons in New York City, Appalachia, and Texas. Erin now teaches creative writing at Northern Arizona University, her alma mater in her hometown of Flagstaff. Erin co-edits *Waxwing* (www.waxwingmag.org).

Suzanne Whitaker

City/Town: Phoenix, Arizona

Discipline: Visual Arts

In 2015, muralist Suzanne Whitaker collaborated with Lainey Prather, an artist whose specialty is plaster finishes, on "Abigail," a portrait/chair honoring Abigail Adams, a founding mother of the United States. Through their research, the artist were surprised to learn how much influence Abigail had had during her time, primarily in respect to laws around women and education. Even still, like all other American women prior to the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, Adams was not allowed to actually vote. With their new project, funded in part by an Artist Research & Development Grant, Whitaker and Prather will tell the stories of 19 American women via portraiture accompanied by short essays. They hope to complete their project in time for the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment in 2020.

Each piece will reflect the product sources, artifacts, fabrication, techniques, styles, etc. of the subject's time period. For example, "Abigail" emerges from slatted and plastered walls, the look of which we copied, after a bit of research, from Abigail's last home. Further, having learned that much of the information about Abigail's contribution to American history was preserved through letters to her husband, John, the artists fashioned a three dimensional outpouring of "aged" parchment.

Using their talents to spotlight women's stories of bravery, strength, standing up to the status quo, stories that have so often gone untold or relegated as less important, the artists hope to play a part in preserving the importance of women's voices in the United States.