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## Here are the Houston artists that won some of the biggest art prizes this year

Houston's Artadia Awards and Idea Fund grants are especially important lifelines this year.



Molly Glentzer | January 12, 2021 Updated: January 13, 2021, 2:10 pm



Valentine Jager, left, and Bria Lauren have won Artadia's Houston awards for 2021, a prestigious prize that includes \$10,000 in unrestricted funds.

Photo: "Valentine Jager by Agustín Arce; Bria Lauren by Troy Montes" / Valentine Jager by Agustín Arce; Bria Lauren by Troy Montes

Bria Lauren, a photographer and filmmaker from Third Ward who has found her voice documenting the lives of Black women in her community, wasn't sure last year how she was going to make it.

"As an artist, I have relied heavily upon freelance photography work and hustle since August of last year," she posted on her Facebook page. "The stay-at-home order has placed me in a position of unemployment, and surprisingly all I want to do is make and act with

me in a position of unemployment, and surprisingly all I want to do is make and act with what I do have. In a time like this, Hood mamas, grannies, aunties, sisters, cousins, & best-friends are doing what we've always done — survive. We innovate, create, make meals stretch, lean on our communities, and do what we gotta do. I want to be safe of course, but I have to continue my work for hood women more than ever because we need it.

“We gon be alright,” she ended. Indeed. In the past week, she has received two important career boosts.

Lauren is one of two Houston recipients of the annual Artadia Awards, which include an unrestricted grant of \$10,000 and access to a prestigious national network. And that news went public a few days after another initiative, the Idea Fund, announced that Lauren would receive one of its \$5,000 awards this year toward her “Gold Was Made Fa’ Her” portrait series.

Awards with cash grants are always a lifeline for working artists, but never more so than now. A year into a pandemic that shuttered programs at small- and mid-size art spaces across Houston, many are still struggling.

The Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs, Houston Arts Alliance and Mid-America Arts Alliance distributed \$5 million to artists, cultural organizations, music venues and musicians last year, providing CARES funds to 691 recipients. While organizations received much larger amounts, more than \$1.2 million went to 534 individual creatives in music, visual arts, writing, film/media, theater, dance and design for basic life needs such as food and rent.

Performance artist, sculptor and writer Valentina Jager, a native of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico who moved to Houston in 2018 to pursue a PhD in Creative Writing in Spanish at the University of Houston, also received an Artadia Award. Jager uses text, sculpture and performance to explore how language can be contingent or have shifting meaning. During her time as a Houston Artadia fellow (a \$2,500 award) last year, the organization described her work as “infused with a deeply poetic sensibility that sheds light on the precariousness of truth, the subjectivity of interpretation, and the fragile nature of memory.”

Cindee Travis Klement, Anna Mavromatis and Phillip Pyle II also were Artadia finalists this year, chosen by DiverseWorks curator Ashley DeHoyos and curators from the Yale Art

Gallery and New York's Museum of Modern Art. DeHoyos and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston curator Rebecca Matalon visited studios as part of the process.

"Artists play an essential role in shaping our communities, serving as social leaders and cultural innovators," Artadia executive director Carolyn Ramo said. Along with Artadia's board and individual donors nationally, the John R. Eckel Jr. Foundation, the Brown Foundation and the Houston Endowment support Houston's awards.

The Idea Fund, meanwhile, gave 12 grants of \$5,000 each. A partnership between DiverseWorks, Aurora Picture Show and Project Row Houses, the fund is supported by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Lauren's project and other Idea Fund awards this year emphasize social equality and justice, supporting projects that range from murals and performances to a neighborhood drive-in cinema and a culinary event. The jurors were curator Roya Amirsoleymani of Portland, Ore., independent curator Leslie Moody Castro and choreographer Harrison Guy, the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corp.'s art and culture director.

Grants went to Qais Assali's "Two Sides of the Same Coin," a project about Queer Arab identity; Banke Awopetu's "Summon," a street performance about the spiritual power of Black women; Gregory Michael Carter's conceptual sculpture "Machine to Retrieve Reparations"; Sol Diaz's "The Place I know," a series of large-scale paintings that will be pasted throughout the Heights; Matthew Flores and Ángel Lartigue's visual performance and chapbook "Forensic Excavation," about migrant deaths in South Texas; Yu-Ru Huang's "The Human Behind the Object," a 60-foot, evolving mural at the Houston Taiwanese Community Center; Hueston Collective's photomural project "The Uncomfortable Staging"; Vinod Hopson's "Those Who Desire - en los Brazos de Dios," a historical tour from a boat on the Brazos River; Henry G. Sanchez's bilingual, participatory video art project "Todos/We The People"; Prince Varughese Thomas and Britt Thomas' "2 Post Cinema" at T.C. Jester Park; and "Tongue and Cheek," a culinary event combining an artist-made and delivered vegetarian meal and a Zoom experience by life partners Preetika Rajgariah and Lovie Olivia, who call their collective Two Dykes and a Knife.

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