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ARTADIA ANNOUNCES 2021 HOUSTON AWARDEES



Left to Right: Verónica Gaona, Robert Hodge, and Preetika Rajgariah

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(Houston, TX | January 6, 2022) – **Artadia**, a nonprofit grant making organization and nationwide community of visual artists, curators, and patrons, is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2021 Houston Artadia Awards: **Verónica Gaona, Robert Hodge, and Preetika Rajgariah.**

Press-approved images of each artist’s work are available [here](#).

Verónica Gaona, Robert Hodge, and Preetika Rajgariah will each receive \$10,000 in unrestricted funds, as well as access to the ongoing benefits of the Artadia Award program. The decision followed an extensive jury process, culminating in a virtual studio visit with jurors **Natalie Dupêcher**, Associate Curator of Modern Art, the Menil Collection and **PJ Gubatina Policarpio**, Independent Curator, Writer, and Manager of Youth Development at Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Of the process, **PJ Gubatina Policarpio** notes, “This year’s awardees’ bold and multifaceted work challenge systems of power and notions of belonging with intellectual clarity and technical rigor that advance their practices forward with innovation.”

Of the Awardees, **Natalie Dupêcher** adds, “In his multimedia, collage-based objects, Robert Hodge collects and manipulates a vast array of foraged materials—from classroom maps and vinyl records to decades-old magazines and his own, experimental prints—to explore the interrelation of past and future, self and community. Gathering materials and conducting fieldwork along the Mexico-United States border landscape, Verónica Gaona creates spare, sometimes ephemeral objects, installations, and performances that explore the poetics of migration and permanence, memory and loss. Preetika Rajgariah makes visually lush yoga mat paintings, intricate performances, and installations; autobiographical and often mordantly funny, her work pushes against Western aesthetics and beauty standards, centering her own body as a site and instrument of decolonization. In these very different but rigorous and richly imaginative practices, Hodge, Gaona, and Rajgariah each explore some of the most pressing issues of our time.”

The 2021 Houston Artadia Award application was open to visual artists working in any visual media, at any stage in their career, who have been living and working within Harris County for a minimum of two years. This year’s Finalists for the Award included Jessica Carolina González, Cindee Travis Klement, and Karen Navarro, selected by jurors **Natalie Dupêcher**, Associate Curator of Modern Art, the Menil Collection; **María Elena Ortiz**, Curator, the Pérez Art Museum Miami; and **Jami Powell**, Curator of Indigenous Art, Hood Museum of Art.

The 2021 Houston Artadia Awards are generously supported by the Brown Foundation, the John R. Eckel Jr. Foundation, Cecily Horton, the Stolbun Family, the Artadia Board of Directors, and individual donors from across the country.

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About [Artadia](#)

Since its founding in 1999, Artadia has awarded over \$5 million in unrestricted funds to over 350 artists. Celebrating visual artists and the foundational role they play in shaping society, the Artadia Award benefits three artists annually in each of six major US cities with high concentrations of creative workers—Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. Beyond the grant, the Award includes lifelong access to a community of fellow artists and patrons. The Artadia Award is designed to provide essential funding and recognition to artists at pivotal points in their careers, strengthen their communities, and spur new levels of career achievement.

About [Verónica Gaona](#)

Verónica Gaona is an interdisciplinary artist from Brownsville, Texas, a city along the U.S. México border, living and working in Houston. Gaona has exhibited at Lawndale Art Center, Blaffer Art Museum, Art League Houston, and Amarillo Museum of Art among others. Gaona has been in residence at Desert Unit for Speculative Territories in Marfa, Texas and the Saint-Nazaire School of Art in Nantes, France.

Gaona investigates notions of migration, architecture, and death by conducting location-driven research across the Texas-México border landscape. Considering the voices of displaced and exploited communities, Gaona materializes characteristics of diaspora such as transnationality and impermanence to redress traditional approaches to memorialization. Her artwork exists at the intersection of installation, performance, digital media, and sculpture and it brings to the foreground labor and spatial issues at play.

About [Robert Hodge](#)

Robert Hodge (American, b.1979) is an multidisciplinary artist based and working currently in Houston Texas. Hodge's practice includes multimedia paintings, collages, music based projects and installations. Hodge has exhibited nationally and internationally and is currently finishing the album "*DJ Screw Forever*" in collaboration with the Contemporary Museum of Houston.

Grounded in the rich continuum of African American history and cultural expression, Robert Hodge's work celebrates resilience and reclamation, with his commemorations of African American musical and cultural icons serving to both preserve the past and illuminate the present.

About [Preetika Rajgariah](#)

Preetika Rajgariah (b. 1985) is a multidisciplinary artist whose works examines the complicated intersections of cultural identity, race, capitalism, and sexuality while referencing her traditional upbringing as an Indian born American. She has exhibited and performed in spaces such as Untitled Miami Basel, the Asia Society Texas Center, Roots & Culture and the Donnelley Foundation in Chicago, the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts in San Francisco, Women &

Their Work in Austin, and Diverseworks Houston. She received her MFA from the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign and currently lives and works in Houston, TX.

Through painting, object making, video installation, and performance, Rajgariah weaves together her unique life experiences as a queer, Indian born Texan, with culturally loaded materials to explore the ways in which an immigrant experience counters and aligns with a southern American upbringing. She has a direct relationship to the materials she uses in her work: saris her mother wore, sindoor powder from a failed marriage, rakhis she ties to my brother, hair shorn from her head, and yoga mats from the local community - all to decolonize beauty standards, unlearn capitalist programming, and recognize the nuanced difference between appropriation and appreciation.