

ARTADIA
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ANNOUNCING THE 2023 ATLANTA ARTADIA AWARDEES



Left to right: Jessica Caldas (photo credit Brian Bates); Stefanie Jackson (photo credit Lela Jenkins); and Nneka Kai (photo courtesy of the artist).

(Atlanta, GA | November 29th, 2023)

Artadia, a non-profit grantmaking organization and nationwide community of visual artists, curators, and patrons, is thrilled to announce the recipients of the 2023 Atlanta Artadia Awards: **Jessica Caldas; Stefanie Jackson; and Nneka Kai.**

The 2023 Atlanta Artadia Awards application was open to visual artists working in any visual media, at any stage in their career, who have been living and working within **Barrow, Bartow, Butts, Carroll, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Hall, Henry, Morgan, Newton, Paulding, Pickens, Rockdale, Spalding, and Walton counties** for a minimum of two years. The 2023 Atlanta Artadia Awards are supported by the Ressler/Gertz Family Foundation, Artadia Board of Directors, Artadia Council supporters, and individual donors across the country.

The decision was reached after an extensive two-tiered jurying process culminating in virtual studio visits with jurors **Liz Andrews**, Director, Spelman College Museum of Fine Art and **Rory Padeken**, Vicki and Kent Logan Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Denver Art Museum.

On the jurying process, **Padeken** shared, “Artadia continues to play a pivotal role in supporting artists at critical moments in their careers. This year’s cohort of exceptional artists explore a range of complex issues related to the law, gender identity, labor, racial and political injustices, and the cosmic imaginary. I look forward to seeing how their work develops in the future.”

Fellow juror **Andrews** remarked, “The vibrant and diverse pool of finalists from Atlanta showed me, yet again, how powerful of a place Atlanta is for artists.”

Andrews commented on Caldas' practice: "The soft sculptures Jessica Caldas creates are beautifully constructed and somehow monumental in some instances while always feeling deeply intimate."

"Jessica Caldas envelops viewers in love and care, empathy and understanding, creating spaces that bear witness to and honor the lived experiences of women who labor, who give birth, who struggle, who survive, and who triumph," said **Padeken**.

"Stefanie Jackson's paintings feel wild and surreal, and her long-standing practice deserves this recognition and so much more," stated **Andrews**.

On Jackson's work, **Padeken** shared, "Stefanie Jackson is a dreamer and a storyteller who envisions fictional worlds haunted by nightmarish realities, addressing issues regarding racial and political injustices, the erasure of African American histories, and social inequity and inequality in the United States."

"In Nneka Kai's work, hair becomes a method, a line, a tool, and a thread to mend, bind, and weave an embodied experience of Black identity, thought, and material culture through languages of performance and abstraction," said **Padeken**.

"Nneka Kai's work is rooted within a deeply informed curiosity about the power of Black hair, and I believe that we have only begun to see the great art she will bring to the world," felt **Andrews**.

In addition to **Caldas**, **Jackson**, and **Kai**, this year's finalists for the Awards included **Jane Foley**, **Courtney McClellan** and **Sergio Suárez**, selected by **Rachel Adams**, Chief Curator and Director of Programs, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts; **Liz Andrews**, Director, Spelman College Museum of Fine Art; and **Jia Yi Gu**, Director and Curator, MAK Center, LA.

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

About Artadia

Since its founding in 1999, Artadia has awarded over \$6 million in unrestricted funds to over 390 artists nationally. Celebrating visual artists and their foundational role in shaping society, the Artadia Award benefits three artists annually in seven major US cities with high concentrations of creative workers—Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

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About [Jessica Caldas](#) (she/her)

Jessica Caldas is a Puerto Rican American artist, based in Georgia and Florida. Her work connects personal and community narratives to larger themes and social issues. She has recently completed the Working Artist Prize Fellowship at MOCA GA in 2022-2023. Her work has been shown at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, GA as well as the Art & History Museums of Maitland, FL and is included in the collections of Kilpatrick Townsend, The City of Atlanta Office of Cultural Affairs, MOCA GA, and the Kyoto International Community House. She looks forward to her first international solo exhibition at CICA Museum in Korea in 2024.

Caldas received her Masters of Fine Arts degree at Georgia State University in 2019 and received her BFA in printmaking from the University of Georgia in 2012. She is a part of Living Melody Collective and currently runs Good News Arts, a small community arts space and gallery in rural North Central Florida and holds a part time position as the Program Manager at Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta.

Caldas' work is driven by personal experience and its connection to contemporary and historical issues. Overall, her work addresses the complexities and intricacies of care and identity in our current culture. She seeks to make challenging experiences accessible to those without the same somatic knowledge while still engaging in conversation and confrontation. In her practice, she incorporates layered, labor intensive drawings, collage, sculpture, performance, et al, into fully realized mixed media works and immersive installations. Within her work, the viewer is met with bodily experiences that mirror the complexities of the stories she shares, with a focus on shared knowledge, awareness, empathy, and change.

About [Stefanie Jackson](#) (she/her)

Jackson's paintings draw on her life experience, having lived in Detroit, New York, New Orleans, Athens, Georgia and now Atlanta, Georgia. She is interested in how southern culture has influenced the North, especially the blues as a musical, literary, and visual phenomenon. Her artwork has responded to the Atlanta Race Riots of 1906, the devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina, Motown Detroit, issues of violence and neglect in urban environments, and the community of Hog's Hammock, Sapelo Island, Georgia. Jackson draws inspiration from family tragedies, including losing her cousin to violence in Detroit, which is commemorated in Little Girl Blue in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Stefanie Jackson is an American painter whose art deals with themes of African American culture and contemporary issues. Born in Detroit, Michigan, she has lived for decades in the South, and her visual concepts reflect that dichotomy between north and south. She is a recipient of numerous awards, including Anonymous Was a Woman, the Pollock Krasner Foundation Award, the Georgia Council of the Arts Award, the Adolf and Esther Gottlieb Foundation Award, and the National Endowment for the Arts in recognition of her life's dedication to art. Jackson's work has been shown at the Georgia Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Walker Art Center, and many other museums across the country. Her solo exhibition Pastime Paradise was shown at Richard Beavers Gallery in New York, Fall of 2022. She has studied in France, Italy, and attended several artist-in-residence programs.

About [Nneka Kai](#) (she/her)

Nneka Kai is an interdisciplinary artist from Atlanta, GA. She received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago from the Fiber & Material Studies Department and her BFA in Textiles from Georgia State University. Her work and research explore the material and conceptual language of Black hair.

Nneka Kai's interdisciplinary practice begins with the question, "What is the free Black feminine form?" By employing natural and synthetic hair, Kai uses textile, performance, and sculpture to expand and question the notions of history, site, and identity.