



ARTADIA
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ANNOUNCING THE 2024 21c CINCINNATI ARTADIA AWARDEE



Left to right: Erika NJ Allen, *This is Not a Coup*, 2022; Portrait of Awardee Erika NJ Allen (photo credit Tryst Red); Erika NJ Allen, *Green Banana Wall*, 2022.

(Cincinnati, OH | August 20, 2024)

21c Museum Hotels, a multi-venue contemporary art museum and award-winning hospitality company, and **Artadia**, a non-profit grantmaking organization and nationwide community of visual artists, curators, and patrons, are thrilled to announce **Erika NJ Allen** as the recipient of the **2024 21c Cincinnati Artadia Award**.

Launched in Louisville, KY in 2021, the 21c Artadia Award is a long-term partnership that annually provides **\$15,000** in unrestricted funds to one artist living and working in the unique creative communities where 21c Museum Hotels are located. Previous 21c Artadia Award cycles have granted three artists with unrestricted awards – **Kiah Celeste** (2021 Louisville), **Kathy Liao** (2022 Kansas City), and **André Leon Gray** (2023 Research Triangle).

The 21c Artadia Award is designed to provide essential funding and recognition to artists at pivotal points in their careers, strengthen arts communities, and spur new levels of career achievement. In addition to the grant itself, the Award includes lifelong access to the Artadia Network, a support program nurturing strategic relationships and connecting Awardees with a community of fellow artists and a diverse cohort of professionals.

The 2024 21c Cincinnati application was open to artists working in any visual media, at any stage in their career, who have been living and working within Hamilton, Butler, and Warren counties in

Ohio or Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties in Kentucky for a minimum of two years. We received **80** applications, with **51.2%** of the applicants identifying as Black, Native American or Alaskan Native, Latinx, Asian, Arab, biracial or multiracial; **67.6%** as women, gender nonconforming, or nonbinary; and **56.6%** as **emerging** artists.

The Award decision was reached after an extensive two-tiered jurying process. Alongside awardee Erika NJ Allen, this year's finalists for the Award included **Andrew Au** and **Trudy Gaba** selected by jurors **Jessica Hong**, Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Toledo Museum of Art, and **Monique Long**, Independent Curator.

"As a curator, I always look forward to participating in award juries," shared **Long**. "It's an exciting part of my job: to be invited to engage with makers concentrated in another region and their concerns. If you are not familiar with these Cincinnati-based artists, I encourage you to take a look."

"The strength and diversity of applications from the Cincinnati community exceeded 21c's already high expectations, and we are thrilled to congratulate awardee Erika NJ Allen and finalists Andrew Au and Trudy Gaba, all of whom are pursuing dynamic material and conceptual practices," said 21c Chief Curator and Museum Director **Alice Gray Stites**. "Allen's personal and professional journey to becoming an inspiring, multi-media artist in Cincinnati is especially compelling, and we look forward to seeing what her future holds. 21c is grateful to jurors Jessica Hong and Monique Long for their thoughtful engagement in this year's award selection."

"Artists are vital activators of our social fabric, so it's always a pleasure and privilege to support their practices. In distinct ways, these artists adroitly explore a range of techniques while engaging with the historical, their contemporary legacies, and future implications," remarked fellow juror **Hong**. "It's been a joy and privilege to delve deeply into these artists' intentional and expansive practices. Through the familiar and the absurd, Erika NJ Allen's empathic work incisively explores the intersection of immigration, consumption, and exploitation, ultimately reminding us of our fraught yet shared humanity and the responsibility we have toward one another."

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

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About 21c Museum Hotel Cincinnati

21c Museum Hotel Cincinnati is a boutique hotel, contemporary art museum and restaurant housed in downtown Cincinnati's historic Metropole Hotel, a 100-year-old landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The 156-room property features over 8,000 square feet of exhibition space presenting rotating curated exhibitions, dynamic public art installations, and cultural programming. Exhibition space is free and open to the public, 365 days a year. The Metropole restaurant features a menu built around seasonal, local ingredients and dishes meant to be shared.

For more information, visit 21cmuseumhotels.com/cincinnati

About 21c Museum Hotels

21c Museum is a multi-venue museum located in eight cities. One of the largest contemporary art museums in the U.S., and North America's only collecting museum dedicated solely to art of the 21st century, each property features exhibition space open free of charge to the public, combined with a boutique hotel and restaurant. It was founded in 2006 by Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson; philanthropists, preservationists, and collectors committed to expanding access to contemporary art as a means of catalyzing revitalization and civic connection. 21c presents a range of arts programming curated by Museum Director, Chief Curator Alice Gray Stites, including both solo and group exhibitions that reflect the global nature of art today, as well as site-specific, commissioned installations, and a variety of cultural events. The organization collaborates on arts initiatives with artists and organizations worldwide, including Speed Art Museum, North Carolina Museum of Art, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Artadia, Creative Capital Foundation, Creative Time, FotoFocus, For Freedoms, and others.

About Artadia

Artadia is a non-profit grantmaking organization and a nationwide community of visual artists, curators, and patrons. Over two decades, Artadia has worked collaboratively to foster a more just arts economy and improve the conditions necessary for artists of all backgrounds to thrive. We elevate the careers of artists at critical moments in their practice through a proven combination of recognition, grantmaking, community support, and advocacy. Since its founding in 1999, Artadia has awarded over \$6 million in unrestricted funds to over 400 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.

For more information, visit artadia.org

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About the Awardee

[Erika NJ Allen](#) (she/her)

Allen (b.1969 Guatemala City, Guatemala) is an artist born in Guatemala and a first-generation college graduate, obtained a BFA in photography from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and later pursued an MFA in ceramics from Cranbrook Academy of Art.

In May 2019, during her senior year of her BFA, Erika underwent a hysterectomy, a deeply personal experience that profoundly transformed her relationship with her body and nourishment. To aid her recovery, she reimagined her diet, focusing on fruits and vegetables, which guided her path to regaining strength through her work with clay. Her art began to reflect this journey, incorporating imprints of the produce she consumed. Each piece blurs the line between authenticity and artifice, symbolizing her body's dual nature—one aspect in decay, the other steadfast and unchanging, much like her medical implants.

A wrist fracture during her graduate studies shifted her focus from personal pain to broader issues. As her pain subsided, Erika chose to explore the banana, a fruit with deep connections to her home country. Her work began to delve into how the banana industry, dating back to the late 1800s and early 1900s, sought to "civilize the banana" and integrate it into American households. Through this exploration, Erika aims to illuminate the historical and political dimensions of the banana industry, which has influenced immigration patterns. She hopes to foster empathy by engaging viewers with narratives of survival and resilience related to immigration.

About the finalists

[Andrew Au](#) (he/him)

Au was born in 1972 in Chicago. He grew up in West Virginia, and has lived in Italy, Washington D.C., and New Orleans. He teaches at Miami University Regionals and maintains Fuse Press Studio with his wife, Jennifer Purdum, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Au's art is a fusion of image and subtext, weaving narratives and rules that all images follow. Influenced by social, political, and scientific themes, his work reflects a childhood immersed in science fiction. Intrigued by the macabre and satirical, his creations explore the depths of human experience and challenge conventional perspectives.

[Trudy Gaba](#) (she/they)

Gaba (b.1988, Atlanta, GA) is an American artist currently working and living in Cincinnati, OH. She works primarily with themes related to power, identity, imperialism, and futurism. Gaba holds a deep fascination with photography of Black subjects, historic and contemporary, as it is forever evolving and expanding. Her work brings into sharp focus peoples and communities positioned on the margins of society.

As an art historian and curator of visual culture that spans a multitude of cultures, continents, and temporal boundaries, Gaba endeavors to make meaningful connections through shared lived experiences of otherness from colonial hierarchy and marginality. Working in collage allows Gaba

the ideal vehicle for world building through the layering and manipulation of disparate images to conjure new narratives and new worlds--a sort of continuity through collision.