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## ARTADIA ANNOUNCES 2024 HOUSTON AWARDEES



**Left to right:** Gabriel Martinez (photo courtesy of the artist), Anna Mayer (photo credit: Jake Dotson), and Alexis Pye (photo credit: Jacob Lee Myers).

(Houston, TX | January 16, 2025)

**Artadia**, a non-profit grantmaking organization and nationwide community of visual artists, curators, and patrons, is thrilled to announce the 2024 Houston Artadia Awardees: **Gabriel Martinez, Anna Mayer, and Alexis Pye**, the Horton Artadia Award recipient.

The 2024 Houston 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 Harris County for a minimum of two years. We received **143** applications, with **68%** of the applicants identifying as Arab, Asian, biracial or multiracial, Black, Latinx, Native American or Alaskan Native; **55%** as women, gender nonconforming, or nonbinary; and **45%** as emerging artists.

The 2024 Houston Artadia Awards are supported by the John R. Eckel Jr. Foundation, Cecily Horton, the Artadia Board of Directors, Artadia Council supporters, and individual donors across the country.

The Awards decision was reached after an extensive two-tiered jurying process. This year's finalists for the Awards included **Leslie Hewitt, JR Roykovich, and Kenneth Tam**, selected by Round 1 jurors **Owen Duffy**, Nancy C. Allen Curator and Director of Exhibitions, Asia Society Texas; **Elena Ketelsen González**, Assistant Curator, MoMA PS1; and **Savannah Wood**, Executive Director, Afro Charities, Inc.

“It was a privilege reviewing the Houston Artadia submissions with Elena and Owen, and learning about so many thoughtful artists working in the city today,” shared Round 1 juror **Savannah Wood**.

“For the finalist cohort, we ultimately landed on a mix of both emerging and established artists whose practices demonstrate a dedication to their craft and their chosen lines of inquiry.”

All six finalists held virtual studio visits with jurors **Owen Duffy** joined by **Megha Ralapati**, Program Director, Fellowships, CEC Arts Link.

“Serving as a juror for Artadia was a humbling, rewarding, and unbelievably challenging experience. Not only did the experience of jurying reaffirm my belief in the vast pool of talent in Houston, but it introduced me to artists that had yet to be on my curatorial radar; artists that I hope to collaborate with in the years to come,” said local juror **Duffy**. “I am grateful to Artadia for this opportunity, and to the artists who applied for this year’s Awards.”

**Ralapati**, who was part of the second round, shared, “The Houston Awardees demonstrate a deep commitment to working within their multifaceted local ecosystem. I was impressed with their conceptual rigor, creative material choices, and sensitive observation of the social, political and collective concerns of our complex and fraught current moment –all with a keen sense of play and a refreshing originality of spirit. We also feel this award will be both pivotal and transformative to all three Awardees’ practices.”

On Martinez’s work, **Duffy** remarked, “A fixture of Houston’s do-it-yourself art scene, Martinez’s practice crosses between social sculpture, experimental sound, and research-based art, resulting in profound artistic statements that urgently engage with the fabric of Houston itself.”

“Martinez has a polyphonic approach to art practice, as he experiments with textile, installation, sculpture, community space, sound and ideas that extend beyond “art,” yet inherently connect it with politics and social reality,” stated **Ralapati**.

“Mayer has distinguished herself as one of the preeminent ceramicists in Texas, creating vital and powerful material histories of place,” shared **Duffy**. “A dedicated educator, her work provides an aspirational model for the next generation of sculptors.”

“The ways Mayer is exploring ceramics in its expanse, considering material, process, symbolism, and spiritual dimensions are thrilling,” said **Ralapati**. “She is innovating in a deeply authentic way with her forms and asking more questions than she is interested to answer.”

On Pye’s practice, **Ralapati** expressed, “Pye is making fresh and delightful paintings rooted in personal stories and a desire to traverse genre and boundary, as she draws influences from the canon of Western Art History, popular culture, and a new visual vocabulary in-the-making.”

“Pye infuses her paintings with fresh energy, thoughtfully reimagining and remixing art history. She truly is one of the most exciting young painters working today,” stated **Duffy**.

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 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.

**Press Contact**

Maya Teich | Programs and Communications Assistant, Artadia | [maya@artadia.org](mailto:maya@artadia.org)

## **About the Awardees**

[Gabriel Martinez](#) (he/him)

Martinez's art explores relationships produced by the built environment and the body's experience of history. It is a material reflection of the potential for culture to enable critical inquiry and engender social change.

Born near an atomic blast crater in the New Mexico desert, Gabriel Martinez is an artist, writer, and performer living and working in Houston. He graduated with an MFA from Columbia University and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program before moving to Houston as a Museum of Fine Arts Core Fellow and artist-in-residence at Project Row Houses. He is the director of Alabama Song, an experimental arts space in Houston, founded in 2012.

[Anna Mayer](#) (she/her)

Anna Mayer uses ceramics—dirt that becomes stone-like once heated—to respond to colonial legacies in land use, archaeology, and 1960s-70s Land Art. Through projects that enact burial and recovery, she points to exploitative human behaviors. Mayer's various materials include human-made artifacts, soft and hard minerals, and complex psychological states.

A 2023-24 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow, Mayer's recent solo exhibitions include the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft and the Jung Center (TX). Group exhibitions include Artpace (TX), Moody Center for the Arts (TX), Blaffer Art Museum (TX), Ballroom Marfa (TX), California Museum of Photography, and Los Angeles Nomadic Division. Mayer is currently in residence at the Galveston Artist Residency (TX).

[Alexis Pye](#) (she/her)

Alexis's practice explores the tradition of portraiture to express the Black body outside of its social constructs. Her practice places Black people, often obscured and misrepresented in the tradition of figurative painting, in a new light. Wanting the audience to reimagine the role of Black community in Fine Arts spaces, creating the foundation for a new art history.

Alexis Pye (born 1995, Detroit, MI) holds a BFA in Painting from The University of Houston. She has had solo exhibitions at Art League Houston, (Houston, 2024), Lawndale Art Center, (Houston, 2023), and Inman Gallery (Houston, 2021). Her work was included in recent group exhibitions at Fort Worth Contemporary Arts at the Art Galleries at TCU (Fort Worth, 2023), Women & Their Work (Austin, 2023), Sheet Cake Gallery (Memphis, 2023) University Museum at Texas Southern University (Houston, 2023), Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (Houston, 2022) and Community Arts Collective (Houston, 2021), She has completed residencies with Project Row Houses (Houston, 2018), Lawndale Art Center (Houston, 2022) and the Asia Society (Houston, 2023) and will attend the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Residency in Summer 2024. Pye lives and works in Houston, TX.

## **About the finalists**

[Leslie Hewitt](#) (she/her)

Working with photography, sculpture, and site-specific installations, Leslie Hewitt addresses fluid notions of time. Her approach to photography and sculpture revisits the still life genre from a post-minimalist/civil-rights movement perspective. Her geometric compositions, which she frames and crystallizes through the spare assemblage of ordinary things, suggests the porosity between intimate and sociopolitical lives.

Leslie Hewitt is an artist and professor. Hewitt has held residencies at the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University and the American Academy in Berlin, Germany amongst others. She currently holds the position of associate professor at Rice University, School of Humanities, Department of Art.

[JR Roykovich](#) (any pronouns)

JR Roykovich (JRR) is a conceptual and research-based artist whose work investigates the physical and metaphorical spaces created by the intersections of Mystery, Queerness and The Sublime. Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach, these inquiries often stem from geographical sites as an impetus to document how psychic history can affect our contemporary experience. JRR often mines these locations for artifacts, remnants of colonialism and capitalism, that get broken down by nature.

These artifacts are then repurposed and reclaimed as hypothetical constructions meant to traverse voyages of inner and outer space, vehicles that come together to overcome trauma and erasure. The sites JRR investigates are situated as fluid and “In/Between,” intuited through JRR as a queer conduit, examining fleeting, ephemeral moments of proxemic space. Resulting in immersive installations, the work is a nerve center to decipher the spatial exchanges happening at these locations to create new phenomenological mythologies.

[Kenneth Tam](#) (he/him)

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Kenneth Tam uses video, sculpture, installation, movement, performance, and photography to examine themes including the performance of masculinity, the transformative potential of ritual, and expressions of intimacy within groups. Tam often implicates the male body in his projects, using humor and pathos to reveal the performative and unstable nature of identity, and often creates situations that foreground tenderness and vulnerability within unlikely settings.

Kenneth Tam was born in Queens, NY and attended the Cooper Union. He is based in Houston, TX and is assistant professor at Rice University, as well as faculty at the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College. He was previously a Core Fellow at the MFAH, and is a recipient of grants from Art Matters, the Jerome Foundation, NYFA and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. He has had solo exhibitions at ICA LA, CA; Queens Museum, NY; Tufts

University Art Gallery, MA; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), CA; Cantor Arts Center, CA; Ballroom Marfa, TX; Visual Arts Center at UT Austin, TX and MIT List Visual Arts Center, MA. He is represented by Commonwealth and Council in Los Angeles, and will have a solo exhibition at Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York in January.