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### **Gerbode Foundation Awards Eight \$50,000 Commissions for new Theater Projects**

**Berkeley, Calif.**—The Gerbode Foundation, in partnership with The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, is pleased to announce the recipients of a \$300,000 initiative to support the creation and production of new theater projects by California writers, playwrights, spoken word artists, creative writers, and theater-makers. The [2022 Theater Awards](#) are the second round of the Special Awards in the Arts program, a three-year, \$900,000 initiative to support the commissioning of individual artists creating new works in dance (2021), theater (2022), and music/sound design (2023). As a result of the continued impact of COVID-19 on artists, regional theaters, and theater presenters, the Gerbode Foundation's Board of Directors approved an additional \$100,000 for this round, resulting in grants to 8 recipients instead of 6. This is the second year the Foundation has increased the number of awards it has made in its Special Awards program.

The new theater projects will be commissioned and premiered by Bay Area nonprofit organizations between July 2023 and December 2025. Each organization will receive a grant of \$50,000; \$12,500 or more will represent a commissioning fee to a California artist, and the remaining funds will be used by the presenting organization for expenses related to the creation and premiere of the new theater project.

The recipients of the 2022 Theater Awards are listed in alphabetical order by organization:

#### **Bindlestiff Studio/Golda Sargento**

*DarkHeart*, a Filipina|x|o Futurism Punk Rock Sci-Fi play, is set in a dystopic diaspora where creativity is outlawed. Mary (played by Sargento), an off-bounder in an authority-controlled corporate kingdom, is arrested for being creative and is detained for Off Planet Work Reprogramming. When Mary's songs find their way into a rogue recording device during a memory wipe, a special frequency connects her to inner-dimensional entities – Art, Artist, and Heart – with whom she discovers a source of liberating power.

#### **Brava!/Kat Evasco**

*Be Like Water* examines the mental health impacts of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies on undocumented families through the story of Lorna, the matriarch of a Filipino American family of four women. Tension builds as they come to terms with their differing immigration statuses and the lies that Lorna tells to keep her adult daughters in the dark about their "illegal" status. The family is thrown into further turmoil when Lorna's daughter, Leah, decides to leave for the Philippines to see her estranged dying father, knowing she can never return to the US.

#### **Campo Santo/Marc Anthony Thompson AKA Chocolate Genius Inc**

Marc Anthony Thompson AKA Chocolate Genius Inc. will write and create the world premiere of *The N\*\*\*\*\* Lovers* for Campo Santo, a performance piece inspired by the miraculous journey of the Crafts, a Black couple who escaped chattel slavery in antebellum Georgia, with the wife, Ellen, masquerading as a white boy, and her husband, William, playing her slave! The story was made historical in their book "A Thousand Miles to Freedom." The piece will be written and shaped for an all-Black company of Campo

Santo performers aesthetically owning minstrel and masquerade notions to reclaim history in the modern world and theatre. This follows Campo Santo's history supporting ground-breaking first-time plays by lead artists from an array of backgrounds.

### **Eugenie Chan Theater Projects/Eugenie Chan**

*The Truer History of the Chan Family, A Virtual Vaudeville*, spoken in English with Chinese subtitles, explores the impact of America's legacy of anti-Asian legislation and sex trafficking of three generations of the playwright's Chinese American family – peasants are sold into prostitution and turned traffickers when legitimate employment becomes impossible. The project exposes the racist policies and practices, and surfaces the pain that drives depression and suicide in a Chinese clan, a long-silenced issue for Asian Americans, while offering hope for reconciliation and healing. This pre-recorded video will be streamed free online and shown in-person at watch parties with community partners.

### **Eye Zen Presents/Marvin K. White**

*OUT of Site: Mighty Real in the Haight* is a new collaboration between theater company Eye Zen Presents; writer, minister and public theologian Marvin K. White; and community partner SF Heritage. Through an intensive research process and two 3-month theatrical runs over two years, the collaborating team will explore the hidden history of queer ancestor, Sylvester, providing an accessible historical understanding of racial equity within the queer liberation movement in San Francisco's Haight neighborhood of the 60's and 70's against the backdrop of the civil rights and anti-war movements, student uprisings, feminism, and gay liberation.

### **Golden Thread Productions/Adam Ashraf Elsayigh and Salma Zohdi**

Adam Ashraf Elsayigh's new play, *Alaa*, in collaboration with Dramaturg Salma Zohdi, is based on the real-life story of the Egyptian blogger, Alaa Abd El-Fattah, who spent much of the last decade in Cairo's Tora Prison. In 2011, Abd El-Fattah's writings made him one of the Egyptian Revolution's leading youth voices. Today, Abd El-Fattah continues to write from solitary confinement, smuggling treatises to the outside world. Elsayigh's *Alaa* invites us to bear witness to one man's struggle for freedom by juxtaposing physical storytelling and embodied ritual with Abd El-Fattah's words from his recently published anthology, *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated*.

### **Magic Theatre/A.M. Smiley (aka Smiley)**

*DIRTY WHITE TESLAS MAKE ME SAD (DWTMMS)* is a performance work written by A.M. Smiley (aka Smiley) about the regentrification of San Francisco and the displacement of Black folks from their neighborhoods. DWTMMS is a testimonial about people and their struggles with hope. The story unfolds over a few days in the life of Sloosh, our protagonist. We follow Sloosh, a young Queer Afro Latina from Bayview Hunters Point caught up in a transcendental rut, as she navigates the City of San Francisco and the consequences of policies that favor new affluence over long-term investment in San Francisco's most diverse sectors.

### **Oakland Theater Project/Lisa Ramirez**

*Chorus of Huertas* is a chamber piece that explores the life of California activist Dolores Huerta. Drawing from both the unique activist style of Teatro Campesino and the choreopoetry of Ntozake Shange, the play seeks to offer a highly theatrical and nuanced portrayal of an underrecognized and impactful figure in California, American, and global history. The play aims to empower audiences and renew the activist spirit Dolores cultivated, while paying homage to the revolutionary life she led.

“This round of awards includes some of California's most influential theater artists of these times,” said Stacie Ma'a, the president of the Gerbode Foundation. “This year, we are supporting playwrights, performance artists, directors, and theater-makers, each with their own signature creative process. We couldn't be more thrilled to support these artists as they lead the way to a new era of theater revival.”

The Gerbode Foundation was assisted in making these grants by an advisory panel composed of the following nationally respected theater experts:

**Armando Huipe** is the executive director of Skylight Theatre Company, an intimate theater located in Los Angeles. Prior to working with Skylight, he served as producer for the national Latinx Theatre Commons, a flagship program of HowlRound Theatre Commons at Emerson College, where he led organizing efforts for the visibility and capitalization of Latinx Theater across the country. He has also worked with companies such as REDCAT, Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Latino Theater Company, and United States Artists. He earned an MFA in Theater Management from Yale School of Drama and a BA in English Literature from UCLA.

Critically acclaimed performer, author, filmmaker, and social engagement artist **Robert Farid Karimi** designs games and interactive performance experiences to spark audiences/players, in all manner of civic spaces, to imagine worlds of mutual community nourishment. Karimi made healthy messaging delicious with the Diabetes of Democracy: a culinary engagement project which inspires audiences to exchange their cultural culinary histories, connect with one another over humor & food, and discover their own power towards personal balance. With his Iranian-Guatemalan heritage as a point of departure, Karimi plays a diverse group of characters in his solo shows, from the mystical Disco Jesus to an idealist cook who wants to save the world's collective stomach to pop star Freddie Mercury. A Creative Capital artist, Pushcart Prize-nominated writer RobertFaridKarimi featured their work on NPR, The Smithsonian, South by Southwest, HBO's Def Poetry Jam, the Los Angeles Times, Callaloo, Total Chaos: An Anthology of Hip Hop Theory, Asian American Literary Review, A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota, and various platforms/spaces worldwide. Karimi serves as Assistant Professor in the School of Music, Dance and Theater at Arizona State University.

**Dr. Monica White Ndounou** is an Associate Professor of Theater and the founding Executive Director of [The CRAFT Institute](#), which convenes [The International Black Theatre Summit](#) and administers the Pay-It-Forward All-Career Level Mentorship Program along with various initiatives designed to create culturally inclusive ecosystems throughout the world of arts and entertainment by transforming formal training and industry practices while promoting equitable access. She is also the past President of the Black Theatre Association (BTA) (2016-2018) and Vice President of Advocacy for the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) (2019-2021), and serves on the board of [The August Wilson Society](#). She is a founding member of the National Advisory Committee of [The Black Seed](#), a national strategic plan to create impact and thriving for Black theater institutions and initiatives. She is an alum of The Black Arts Institute and a co-founder of [CreateEnsemble.com](#), a digital platform for creative artists of color.

**Kristina Wong** is a performance artist, comedian, writer, and elected representative who has been presented internationally across North America, the UK, Hong Kong, and Africa. She's been awarded artist residencies from MacDowell, New York Theater Workshop, the San Diego International Airport, and Ojai Playwrights Festival. Her work has been awarded with grants from Creative Capital, The MAP Fund, Center for Cultural Innovation, National Performance Network, and the Art Matters Foundation; a COLA Master Artist Fellowship from the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs; nine Los Angeles Artist-in-Residence awards; and Center Theatre Group's Sherwood Award. Her currently touring "Kristina Wong, Sweatshop Overlord" is a "New York Times Critics Pick" and Lucille Lortel Award Winner for "Outstanding Solo Performance" that premiered off-Broadway at New York Theater Workshop.

***About the Gerbode Foundation***

*[The Gerbode Foundation](#) is interested in programs and projects offering potential for significant impact. The primary geographical focus is on the San Francisco Bay Area and Hawaii. The Foundation's program areas include advancing truth, justice, the environment, the arts, and special initiatives which include strengthening the philanthropic process and the nonprofit sector.*

***About the Special Awards Program***

*Founded in 1987, the [Special Awards in the Arts Program](#) supports the creation of new works in dance, theater production, and music composition. These nationally respected awards have helped underwrite acclaimed new works that are culturally and aesthetically diverse, by prominent and emerging artists. These grants have supported artists at critical junctures in their careers; enabled nonprofit local arts groups to develop and debut substantial, original works; and enriched Bay Area audiences, readers, and viewers by giving them first access to ambitious new creations.*

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