

Stevie Wilson

DIY Youth Arts Residency

Program Report | April 2022

Launched in January 2022, the Stevie Wilson DIY Youth Arts Residency was conceptualized and designed by Project NIA and Rachael Zafer to support young artists, ages 16-25, who have been formerly incarcerated or criminalized. Artists were invited to submit applications for a DIY (do it yourself) creative residency to buy their time back and create art on a dedicated schedule. The residency program supports artists of varied mediums with a wide range of experience and demonstrates Project NIA's belief that time to create art is inherently valuable.

18 artists between the ages of 19 and 24 were selected by a committee of formerly incarcerated artists based on creativity, demonstrated need, and the residency's relationship to collective liberation and the prison industrial complex abolition movement. Artists will receive awards totaling \$50,000 and will conduct their residencies through November 2022.

"As a formerly incarcerated artist, I found myself with a renewed commitment to my own art and ambitions. These young artists blessed us with their vision but also with their vulnerability, their tenacity, and their commitments to the abolition movement and community. I am encouraged to see them develop within the artist community and to work alongside them in the future as we all look to continue the work ahead."

– Aylaina Thornton, selection committee member

Named after Stevie Wilson, a currently incarcerated, Black, queer, writer, activist, and student, this residency celebrates their work organizing, writing, and leading study groups behind and across prison walls. We are delighted to publicly announce the awards on April 16, 2022—Stevie Wilson's 48th birthday. You can follow Stevie on twitter @agitateorganize.

The inaugural Stevie Wilson DIY Youth Arts Residency program was funded by independent donors. A significant donation made in memory of Shaira Yasmin Ali allowed us to nearly double the awards we planned to make at the project's inception.

"Being on the selection committee was a powerful and fulfilling experience. Looking at the proposals from these young artists, I was moved by the expansive ideas and the fusion of mediums, styles, and genres. Giving these young people money so that they could pay for rent, utilities, and food, and therefore have time to hone in and create art speaks to this residency's poignant efforts to invest in the next generation of artists who are community oriented and abolitionist in consciousness."

– Michelle Daniel Jones, selection committee member



To learn more about selected artists and their DIY residencies, follow Project NIA on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook and follow the hashtag #DIYResidency.

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Selected artists will conduct residencies in a myriad of mediums for periods of time between three weeks and nine months in locations across the country. Artists received awards to support the purchase of supplies, to pay for rent and studio space, and cover expenses including missed wages, transportation, utilities, groceries, and child care.

17 of the 18 selected artists identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color. 3 of the artists identify as non-binary or transgender, and 4 of the artists are parents.

2022 residency awards were made to the following young artists:

Abigail Cook (21 | Atlanta, GA)

Six-month residency to create a public art sculpture installation reimagining the jail cell

Chasity Kim Hunter (23 | New Orleans, LA)

Six-month residency to write, publish, and distribute a poetry anthology

Chicanito (20 | Chicago, IL)

Two-week residency to create a public art installation reimagining a safer Southside Chicago

Davona Watson (23 | Los Angeles, CA)

Three-week multimedia painting, drawing, writing, and dance residency to explore creative healing

"I want to explore my curiosity of what my existence is like beyond struggle and embody a greater sense of peace and focus. Through my creative healing, thus I will share, show, and inspire creative healing for others."

– Davona Watson (23 | Los Angeles, CA)

Dominic Felton (23 | Chicago, IL)

One-month residency to explore creative cultural sites and develop a drawing portfolio

Harold Cruz (23 | New Haven, CT)

One-month residency to develop sewing and creative furniture restoration skills



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2022 residency awards were made to the following young artists:

Hollywood (22 | Lansing, MI)

Five-month residency to create a handmade artist book about the community impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Jeremy (22 | Harlem, NY)

Three-month residency to create repurposed painted and sewn clothing

Nykia Gatson (20 | Wichita, KS)

Four-month residency to create design concepts imagining the elimination of juvenile prisons

Rocky (22 | Brooklyn, NY)

Three-week residency in Olympia, Washington to develop paintings, drawings, music, and ceramics

"I think the residency's funds would allow me a temporary respite from the current trappings of the capitalistic work cycle, and have intentional time solely to focus on creating art and music, which otherwise I would not be able to do."

– Rocky (22 | Brooklyn, NY)

Ronnieprints (24 |Chicago, IL) and William Baker III (23 |Chicago, IL)

Three-month residency to create a multimedia film, print, paint, and photography installation and public art show about the prison industrial system

Ruby Wilson (20 | Washington, DC)

Two-month residency to create an abolitionist coloring book

"This residency would allow me to buy the time not only to create art, but to rest, which is just as important to me in the creative process."

– Ruby Wilson (20 | Washington, DC)

Sage Henry (23 | Miami, FL)

Two-month residency to create a multimedia photography, video, and poetry project that explores how Black people in Miami are displaced



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2022 residency awards were made to the following young artists:

Shawna Bullen-Fairbanks (19 | Bemidji, MN)

One-month residency in Minneapolis to draw, paint, and write a short story based on personal experience

"I couldn't create artwork like this ever without the financial support I would need as I am a part of the poorer/middle class. These funds would greatly help me achieve my dreams and make this work of art a reality that would hopefully inspire others as well and make them feel something powerful within themselves."

– Shawna Bullen-Fairbanks (19 | Bemidji, MN)

Troy Hunter (22 | Portland, OR)

Six-month residency to develop a photography portfolio

Violeta (22 | Chicago, IL)

Seven-month residency to support art classes and community building for transgender artists in Chicago

Zyshawn (22 | Baltimore, MD)

Two-month residency focused on painting and personal artistic development

To learn more about selected artists and their DIY residencies, follow Project NIA on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook and follow the hashtag #DIYResidency.

Donations to support young artists and future creative residencies can be made to Project NIA at www.project-nia.org.

