Individual Artist Awards
RASMUSON FOUNDATION

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We work to promote a better life for Alaskans.

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Foundation announces 2023 Individual Artist Awardees: 36 Alaska artists, makers and culture bearers

Anchorage, AK – A dance teacher will explore Filipino folk-dance forms. A photographer plans to document his mother's journey to her South Korea homeland. A cultural anthropologist will write a stage play about the women who portrayed Aunt Jemima.

They are among the 36 Alaska artists receiving recognition as part of Rasmuson Foundation's 2023 Individual Artist Awards. With these awards, the Foundation marks the 20-year milestone of grants that go directly to artists, makers and culture bearers across Alaska. Award amounts increased in 2023 with 25 $10,000 Project Awards, 10 $25,000 Fellowship Awards and one $50,000 Distinguished Artist Award.

The Distinguished Artist recognition for 2023 goes to Anna Brown Ehlers, a culture bearer and Chilkat weaver born in Juneau into the Whale House, her ancestry deeply rooted in Klukwan, an ancient Tlingit village historically known for Chilkat weaving. For more than 30 years, Ehlers has been a recognized and prolific producer of Chilkat weavings — robes and tunics, aprons and bibs, hundreds of smaller weavings — for ongoing ceremonial and cultural use. She shares her knowledge, teaching more than 300 people in settings from university classrooms to youth culture camps and mentoring dozens of apprentices in her Juneau home. In addition to using traditional cedar bark and wool, Ehlers experiments with gold wire and silk fibers. She wove one of the largest Chilkat robes ever made, 8 feet by 7 feet, a formline killer whale the size of the actual newborn animal.

A panel of Alaska artists and art experts helped the Foundation select the Distinguished Artist from a slate of nominees. An international panel of artists and experts selected the recipients of Project Awards and Fellowships from a pool of eligible applicants that this year numbered 417, a near record.

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"Artists tell our stories and offer new ways of seeing," said Gretchen Guess, Foundation president and CEO. "We are so grateful for the dedication, talent and vibrancy of Alaska's creative community."

Two groups are among the awardees, receiving Fellowship Awards. Sankofa Dance Theatre – Alaska, based in Anchorage and led by Misha Baskerville and Johnnie Wright, will expand knowledge of traditional African dance. *Katurte* — which means to come together, is a collaboration between Yup'ik artist Nicolette Corbett and Inupiaq artist Katie O'Connor. They will create the first educational Yup'ik alphabet coloring book.

"In our 20 years of providing grants to Alaska artists, they often share how the support impacts them in lasting ways, from providing encouragement and validation to helping turn their vision into art," said Enzina Marrari, the Foundation program officer who has led the Individual Artist Awards since 2019. "Artists remind us of what is beautiful, what is haunting, what it is to be in and of this place. They are our touchstones."

For award recipients, the financial support and accompanying professional development helps them to deepen art practices, explore new ways of making, connect with their cultures, execute research and create countless works of art.

A number of the 2023 awardees plan projects that reflect, honor and explore culture and identity. Alma Manabat Parker, a first-generation immigrant and long-time resident of Ketchikan, will use the art of folk dance and music to create connections between Filipino elders and young people and through her Project Award, deepen her knowledge of all five Filipino folk-dance styles. Young Kim from Anchorage has plans for a photography project in the spirit of a traditional American road trip to include traveling to South Korea with his mother, who has not returned to her homeland in more than two decades. Cultural anthropologist M. C. MoHagani Magnetek's in-progress stage play, "Just Add Water: Reparations for My Soul," will examine the lives of the unacknowledged women who portrayed Aunt Jemima on pancake and syrup packaging and advertising from 1893 to 2020, when the products were rebranded.

Learn more about all the recipients on the Foundation's 2023 IAA web feature. Photos, videos and audio files are available here.

Counting this year's awards, the program now has made a total of 662 grants to individual Alaska artists: 466 Project Awards, 174 Fellowships, 20 Distinguished Artist awards and two special awards, all told more than $6.4 million in direct support to Alaska artists.

About the Foundation

Rasmuson Foundation aims to promote a better life for all Alaskans. Main funding areas are health care; the arts; organizational and community development; human services; and solutions to homelessness. The Foundation was created in 1955 by Jenny Rasmuson, a Swedish missionary, to honor her late husband, banker E.A. Rasmuson.