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NEW YORK, NY – Aug 14, 2023 – The Peace Studio has selected the five artists and five journalists that make up the 2023 Cohort of Peace Studio Fellows. The year-long Fellowship awards $10,000 to mid-career storytellers in support of a project focused on building bridges and having a positive impact.

“We are proud to announce this fellowship and excited to begin working with them, said Tadia Lynch, who oversees the fellowship at The Peace Studio. “Each one of our fellows has the potential to make our culture more peaceful and collaborative.

To kick off the fellowship, the cohort will gather for a three-day retreat in Grand Rapids, Mich. where they will learn the “Skills for Creative Peacebuilding” curriculum and get connected to every facet of The Peace Studio community as well as to the Public Media system.

“This year we are partnering with Public Media through the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA), said Mariano Avila, Executive Director of Programs at The Peace Studio and a former Public Media journalist. Our fellowship retreat is a track within the NETA conference and will better connect our fellows to their local stations.”

Beyond the award and the conference, the fellowship challenges participants to dream bigger by offering them mentorship and connections in arts, journalism and entertainment.

“We have a phenomenal network of supporters and volunteers waiting to mentor and connect our fellows, said Thomas West, Executive Director of Development. For starters, we couldn’t have done this without the generosity of Bob Stiller, whose support made the award possible.”

The convocation brought in 123 applicants which then went through a three-stage review process, including a panel, and ultimately yielded the 10 incredible fellows listed below.

The Peace Studio seeks to foster a culture of peace by resourcing and supporting artists and journalists who want to have a positive impact on society.
The Peace Studio 2023-2024 Fellows

Brent Billingsley
Brent is an artist and an empowering voice behind youth and communities. He is also a Behavioral Health Specialist at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center/Psychiatry and the CEO of Art Reconciliation Truth and Empowerment. “ARTE” is a non-profit geared toward the utilization of therapeutic artistic engagement and the performance arts. Brent believes that the world can be changed through art, through children and through us.

Marie Cusick
Marie serves as editorial director for the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs (SRL)--a hands-on journalism training program that connects young people to real-world experiences. Marie joined SRL after eight years as a reporter at Public Media stations in New York and Pennsylvania where she covered politics, science, technology, energy and the environment. She is passionate about elevating the voices of young people.

Jessica Doe, PhD
Jessica is an Aniyunwiya interdisciplinary poet and artist. As a native of the occupied land of what is often referred to today as “Oregon” and a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, space, place, and de-colonization are the driving forces behind her work, which includes 15 books and several solo exhibitions. Her doctoral work addressed the meeting point of eating disorders and female poetics with an emphasis on Indigenous literature and medicine.

Ar Ducao
Ar (they / zey) is a new media artist, engineer, organizer and educator. Ducao’s 3D animations and visualizations have been shown in venues and festivals around the world. Ducao is also a co-founder and principal at Multimer, a bio-spatial analytics spinoff from MIT Media Lab. Their current project is an animated, adult sci-fi series called "The Great Tit is a Bird.” They have published two books as well as articles in an extensive list of journals.
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Meleika Gardner

Meleika’s is a producer from Evanston, Illinois whose work brought about the city’s highest voter turnout in nearly half a century. She has also help draft state-wide legislation to teach pre-enslavement history to school children. Meleika is launching a tv network, WtPM TV (Where the People Meet TV), to inform the public and encourage community engagement.

Joshua Niedwick

Joshua is a folklorist and video producer specializing in ethnographic methods aimed at public service. Currently the Production Manager for WKU PBS in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Josh focuses on creating community-oriented content while providing training in video production methods and ethnographic practices to future video professionals. When not working, Josh enjoys experiencing story and narrative in various mediums.

Gabriel Ogunjobi

Gabriel is an independent investigative journalist from Nigeria, reporting on economy and insecurity in West Africa. Lines Magazine and Mongabay, among others. His investigation in 2020 took him undercover to Benin, from Nigeria, where he exposed a network of smugglers. His most recent work focuses on a community where incursionists from Cameroon killed and kidnapped a score of Nigerian citizens and Cameroonian refugees.

Robert Reid

Robert is a writer/producer/host for Gallery America, a monthly arts & culture show for PBS’ OETA (Oklahoma Educational Television Authority). He has covered Native American Artists and museums, Pakistani-American installation artists and several Tulsa artists. Robert has extensive experience in travel writing as well. Last year, he produced “Slow Ride” on Mexican-American lowrider culture in Oklahoma City.
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Thanh Trần

Thanh is a Vietnamese and Black documentary filmmaker and organizer from Sacramento, California. He is the co-founder and co-host of the podcast “Uncuffed”, and the co-founder of the incarcerated film production team “ForwardThis Productions.” Today he is the Director of the documentary “Finding Ma” and the Policy Associate at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.

Luke Willis

Luke short films have been screened at more than 40 film festivals, including Academy Awards and BAFTA. Growing up queer in the South, Luke found refuge in theater and ballet. Today, he is committed to stories of hope and healing for queer and historically excluded communities. He is excited to be part of a new generation of queer storytellers and to contribute to the new repertoire of queer heroes in media.