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Project Row Houses and the University of Houston’s Center for Art & Social Engagement Announce 2020 Fellows

HOUSTON – January 14, 2020 – Project Row Houses (PRH) and the Center for Art & Social Engagement (CASE) at the University of Houston’s Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts (KGMCA) today announced the artists participating in the 2020 KGMCA-PRH Fellowship: Maryland-based Nicoletta Darita de la Brown and Texas-based José Eduardo Sánchez.

The year-long KGMCA-PRH Fellowship invites artists and cultural practitioners to the Third Ward to work alongside urban planners, educators and policy makers. The fellows will engage in creative collaborations that involve the Third Ward community and address issues important to them.

Sánchez and de la Brown will receive mentorship from project administrators Ryan N. Dennis, PRH’s Curator and Programs Director, and Sixto Wagan, director of CASE. Local artists, faculty members, community members and selected leaders will offer their support during this process.

“We are excited to welcome Nicoletta and José as the 2020 participating fellows,” said Dennis. “This program is instrumental in uplifting and showcasing artists like these two who tackle societal and cultural concerns in Houston’s Third Ward. Our organizations are honored to support their work towards building a sustainable community through art.”

Since 2017, more than 250 applications have been received from local, national, and international artists and collectives. The 2020 applications were reviewed by a panel consisting of Michelle White, Senior Curator at the Menil Collection; Rachel Afi Quinn, Assistant Professor in Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Houston; and 2017 KGMCA-PRH Fellow Carrie Schneider.

“We’re excited at how the Fellowships are becoming a significant instrument for positive change in our communities and in the careers of our Fellows,” said Wagan. “The 2020 Fellows and their research interests are timely explorations in how to care for and sustain our communities and our caregivers.”

Both fellows will be introduced at the opening artist talks on Tuesday, January 28, 2020 at 6:30 pm, where they will share additional information on their work focus and the questions that will guide their research throughout the year. At the conclusion of their fellowships, the two will also present lectures/performances that encapsulate their year of research.

The lectures will be held at the University of Houston’s Dudley Hall (4188 Elgin Street). Dudley Hall is in the Fine Arts Building at University of Houston; parking is available in Lot 16 across from the Blaffer Art Museum.

ABOUT THE FELLOWS AND THEIR RESEARCH TOPICS
Nicoletta Darita de la Brown
The Fellowship will allow de la Brown to expand on her prior project “Spirit / Art,” that investigates divine feminine self-healing through reconstruction and re-definition with the use of video, sound, poetry, performance art, and immersive sculptural installation as creative tools. Through interactive workshops and salon-style gatherings, de la Brown will examine how modern society asks women, and people of color, to hold space to care for others and questions, “When do we care for ourselves?” The goal of Spirit / Art is to co-create with other self-identified healers by discovering new ways of sharing modes of self-healing.

Nicoletta de la Brown is a Maryland-based performance artist, interdisciplinary fabricator, filmmaker, mother of four, and self-love champion. Nicoletta is a Black Latinx and proud first-generation Panamanian born in the United States. She is a chamána (shaman) and comes from a long line of healers. Her work reconceives the life of an artist as thriving, nourishing herself and others during and through her creative practice. Nicoletta is also an adjunct faculty in the MFA in Community Arts Graduate Program at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), former Visual Art Department faculty member at Baltimore School for the Arts and is the Maryland Citizens for the Arts (MCA) Artist Navigator. As the Founder of Vida Mágica Love, a creative platform dedicated to healing-centered services, she produces audience participatory engagements through interactive workshops, immersive activations, and multi-sensory experiences.

José Eduardo Sánchez
Sánchez will utilize his experience as a cultural organizer, educator, and language worker to further investigate the implications and ramifications of creative placemaking. Through the Fellowship, he will ask the questions: “Whose social practices get to count as Art?” and “Who gets to have a place - both figuratively and literally - in Place-making?”

Texas-based José Eduardo Sánchez is a queer, immigrant cultural organizer, language worker, and popular educator. His artistic vision challenges neoliberal individualization and the white spatial imaginary by conjuring the self-determination, resilience, and solidarity of marginalized peoples. He does this by creating invitations for communities in struggle to experience the alchemy of food, language, memory, and other forms of life-making as a way to prefigure and actualize collective healing, justice, and liberation. José Eduardo has a B.S. in political science and is a former Greensboro Justice Fund Fellow at the Highlander Center (2012) and Mickey Leland Fellow at the U.S. House of Representatives (2010). His artistic practice is informed by more than ten years of struggle as part of the transnational labor and immigrant justice movements, as well as his roots in Central Mexico and his experience as an immigrant in the U.S. José Eduardo lives in Houston’s North Side and currently organizes in community with La Unidad11 Houston, Familia TQLM, OLTT, and Antena Houston.

Headshots available here. Courtesy of the fellows.

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ABOUT PROJECT ROW HOUSES (PRH)
Project Row Houses (PRH) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people and enriching communities through engagement, art and direct action. PRH was founded in 1993 to be the catalyst for transforming community through the celebration of art and African-American history and culture.

Inspired by the work of German avant-garde artist Joseph Beuys and African-American painter Dr. John
Biggers, the seven founders – James Bettison, Bert Long, Jr., Jesse Lott, Rick Lowe, Floyd Newsum, Bert Samples, and George Smith – purchased 22 historic shotgun-style row houses on two blocks in a disinvested neighborhood in Houston’s Historic Third Ward and began using the houses as spaces for thematic art interventions.

The PRH site now encompasses five city blocks and houses 39 structures that serve as home base to numerous community enriching initiatives, art programs, and neighborhood development activities. Since its inception, PRH has demonstrated over its 25 year-plus history that collective community artmaking is a sustainable vehicle for community transformation. Today, PRH serves as a model for not only the greater Houston region, but for communities all over the world. For more information, please visit projectrowhouses.org.

ABOUT CENTER FOR ART AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
The Center for Art & Social Engagement (CASE) at the Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts (KGMCA) is invested in civic and social engagement initiatives that link the College to the surrounding historic Third Ward neighborhood and the city at large. CASE, which was formerly the Center for Arts Leadership when housed in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, helped lay the groundwork for KGMCA priorities in civic and social engagement. With the establishment of the new College of the Arts in 2016, the center was renamed to clarify and emphasize the important relationship the College has with the city and with the national arts community.