
A BLADE OF GRASS

A Blade of Grass Announces that Founding Executive Director Deborah Fisher Will Step Down in May

Suzy Delvalle Appointed to Serve as Interim Executive Director To Guide Organization's Transition

New York—April 12, 2022—A Blade of Grass, the national nonprofit dedicated to socially engaged art, announced today that its Founding Executive Director Deborah Fisher will step down on May 31, 2022. Fisher has been instrumental in shaping the organization's mission and program as well as guiding it through the challenges of the pandemic. To support the transition leading up to and following Fisher's departure, A Blade of Grass's Board of Trustees has appointed Suzy Delvalle as Interim Executive Director. Delvalle brings considerable experience in arts nonprofit leadership and will support the organization in a research and evaluation phase geared to maturing the nonprofit, diversifying its funding, and rebuilding the structures necessary to reestablish its grants to individual artists. Delvalle most recently served as Interim Executive Director at Socrates Sculpture Park, and has previously held leadership positions at Creative Capital, Sugar Hill's Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, and El Museo Del Barrio. The decision to appoint an interim leader is part of A Blade of Grass's broader, ongoing restructuring. Delvalle began in her new role on April 4, 2022, to ensure a smooth, intentional transition.

"I am profoundly grateful for the experience of building and leading A Blade of Grass. Over the course of more than a decade, we have been able to support and collaborate on more than 60 artists' projects, connect with an incredible range of community partners all over the country and the world, and clearly articulate the value of socially engaged art and the role artists play in both imagining and enacting social change in communities. I am very proud of the work we are now doing to mature A Blade of Grass. By broadening its leadership base, the organization can continue to be a reliable source of funding and discourse for artists who are enacting social change in communities," said Fisher.

"The decision to bring Suzy into an interim role with significant overlap and a clear scope of work is an important part of this process. The Board and I recognize that following a founding leader can be difficult. By taking a moment to evaluate and fine tune our systems and strategies and to become comfortable with a new leader who brings different and highly relevant skills, we can ensure that our structures continue to be aligned with our values and are best developed to support and grow A Blade of Grass's work into the future. This will allow us to set the next Executive Director, and the organization overall, up to succeed." said Fisher.

As part of her work, Delvalle will engage in a four-month phase of research and strategic visioning work with the Board of Trustees. This period of planning will focus on assessing the needs of artists committed to socially engaged art in this post-2020 reality, developing fundraising strategies, and determining the contours of a new program of support for artists akin to the acclaimed Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art. Delvalle will then be responsible for maintaining the organization, its work, and staff until the new Executive Director is hired. The Board of Trustees is aiming to bring someone into the position in early 2023. This news follows A Blade of Grass's recent announcement that it will shift to a paid, professional board that is comprised of artists and arts workers this spring. The shift is part of a multi-phase restructuring process, which also

embraces the decision to hire an interim executive director with highly relevant prior experience diversifying funding for national arts nonprofits that give grants to individual artists, as well as a real interest in leadership transitions and helping organizations reach the next phase in their maturation.

“We are delighted to welcome Suzy to A Blade of Grass. She brings a wealth of expertise and keen insights in helping arts nonprofits grow and develop beyond their founders—a step that can be challenging and requires thoughtful consideration of vision and structure. With Deborah’s decision to move to the next phase of her own career, we knew it was important for us to take time to review our fundraising strategies and plans as well as our internal management and processes. This will allow us to approach our new Executive Director search with clarity of vision and purpose. We are grateful to have Suzy’s incredible knowledge and experience in this moment of change,” said Diya Vij, a member of A Blade of Grass’s Board of Trustees.

As the Founding Executive Director of A Blade of Grass, Fisher created the only national nonprofit that is solely dedicated to both funding and creating content and discourse about socially engaged art. Under her leadership, A Blade of Grass’s team created programs and a funding structure that was uniquely responsive to the needs of artists working within communities with both social change and aesthetic goals. The ABOG Fellowship for Socially Engaged Art is recognized within arts philanthropy as a model for funding socially engaged art projects, and the content, media, field research, and resources produced by A Blade of Grass have inspired an international audience of artists, educators, students, community leaders, and other people inside and outside the art world who are looking for creative approaches to solving problems and advancing social justice goals. Fisher came to her role at A Blade of Grass as an artist with a public and socially engaged practice. Her definition of socially engaged art as the creative use of power and relationships put the organization on a path to consistently enact its own values, and work in a flexible and responsive manner that has yielded particularly high trust relationships with artists and makes this thorough restructuring possible. She has written and lectured extensively about socially engaged art, philanthropy, and creative approaches to institution building.

“Deborah has led A Blade of Grass with passion, care, and profound dedication for more than a decade. Her understanding of and sensitivity to the particular needs of artists working in socially engaged practice set the course for success over many years of service with artists and communities and equally enabled us to emerge from the pandemic with a new sense of commitment, purpose, vision, and inspiration. We are so thankful for her leadership, her unwavering advocacy for the importance and power of art and artists, and also the creativity, joy, and optimism she has brought to A Blade of Grass. We wish her the very best in this next stage of her life and work,” said Brett Cook, a member of A Blade of Grass’s Board of Trustees.

Following her departure from A Blade of Grass, Fisher will be moving to Ithaca, New York to join her husband, Paul Ramirez Jonas, who recently became the Chair of the art department at Cornell. There she will continue building creative communities in a way that is more local and more deeply connected to her creative pursuits. As a serious student of aikido since 2001, she plans to open a dojo and become a teacher. Additionally, Fisher’s art practice has been largely based on divination techniques since 2014, and she plans to expand her astrology practice.

About Suzy Delvalle

Suzy Delvalle has more than 20 years of leadership experience in the arts. Delvalle has committed her career to enhancing the impact of mission-based organizations, building opportunity and equity in the cultural

sector, and empowering artists in their work to transform and uplift communities. She most recently served as Interim Executive Director of Socrates Sculpture Park, where she supported board and staff through a leadership transition by addressing important systems and capacity issues; aligning operations and programmatic work with broader goals, including developing and maintaining funder relationships and surpassing financial projections; and ultimately laying the groundwork for the permanent leader's success.

Previously, Delvalle served as President and Executive Director of Creative Capital, an innovative arts nonprofit that uses venture philanthropy model in the support of individual artists. As the second Executive Director in Creative Capital's history, she oversaw some of the most dramatic changes in the organization's two-decade history. This included increasing the organization's annual operating budget by 20 percent, adding new active board members while also establishing a National Advisory Council, and providing expanded services to artists by instituting annual awards. She also previously served in leadership positions at the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling and El Museo Del Barrio. Additionally, Delvalle serves as adjunct faculty at The New School University and has regularly guest lectured at universities across the country. She serves on the Boards of ArtTable and The Laundromat Project and is a member of The Metropolitan Museum's Advisory Committee in Culture Engagement. She was born and raised in Curaçao and has called New York City home for the last 20+ years.

"I am thrilled to join A Blade of Grass in this critical time of transition and to support the Board of Trustees in their efforts to explore and implement new perspectives, ideas, and strategies to bring the organization into its next chapter. I have always admired A Blade of Grass's approach and commitment to amplifying the work of socially engaged artists and am honored to now have this opportunity to engage with this significant and timely work," said Delvalle. "Deborah has been a thoughtful and visionary leader and I look forward to helping A Blade of Grass build on the tremendous work she has done in active collaboration with the organization's staff and board. Establishing a transparent and responsible practice in leadership transitions is so essential and I am grateful to participate in this process and lend my own experiences to support A Blade of Grass's success."

About A Blade of Grass

A Blade of Grass is a New York-based arts nonprofit dedicated to social engagement. The organization is guided by the core beliefs that artists have essential roles to play in fostering critical conversations on social change and creating new systems and structures that benefit our communities and our lives. A Blade of Grass collaborates actively with artists to realize their visions for specific socially engaged projects or programs, offering a variety of tools that amplify artists' work and build their audiences. It produces public programs, workshops, performances, installations, and other community actions that raise the visibility of artists who are creating change in communities through art.

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