

# PRESS RELEASE

## JEROME FOUNDATION'S 2021 MINNESOTA FILM, VIDEO AND DIGITAL GRANTS ANNOUNCED

**ST. PAUL, MN, November 8, 2021**— The Jerome Foundation Board of Directors authorized 8 grants and 5 finalist awards totaling \$168,000 to early career filmmakers in Minnesota, based on the recommendations of the Minnesota Film, Video and Digital Grant Program Review Panel. This program supports two tracks:

- » All stages of production for the creation of new narrative, documentary, experimental or animated works in film, video or digital formats.
- » Artist development costs for early career filmmakers to engage in self-designed mentorship with experienced directors and to further their filmmaking craft and/or professional skills while working on a specific film, video or digital production project

Of the 39 applications submitted for production grants, four production grants of \$30,000 each were authorized to:

- » Tommy Franklin, for the documentary ***You Don't Know My Name***
- » Tahiel Jimenez Medina, for the narrative short ***My Mama Can't Swim***
- » Shen Xin, for the science fiction narrative ***Solar Wheels of the Steppes***
- » Rhiana Yazzie, for the narrative film ***Wounspe Wankatya: A College Education***

Eleven applications were submitted in this first round of the artist development program. Four grants of \$7,000 each were authorized to:

- » Raven Johnson, for the related project ***Ruby: Portrait of a Black Teen in an American Suburb (working title)***
- » Atlas O. Phoenix, for the related project ***Beautiful Boi***
- » Maribeth Romslo, for the related project ***Growing Up In A Pandemic (Animated Audio Stories)***
- » Kazua Melissa Vang, for the related project ***The Chaperone***

Three finalists were awarded \$5,000 each for their productions:

- » Joua Lee Grande, for the documentary ***Spirited***
- » Effy Kawira, for the narrative film ***Apartment 208***
- » Deacon Warner, for the documentary ***Rethinking Security***

Two finalists were awarded \$2,500 each for their artist development activities:

- » John Mbanda, for the related project ***Red Earth***
- » Dan Yang, for his untitled project

## ABOUT THE GRANTEES AND FINALISTS

### Minnesota Production Grantees



#### **TOMMY FRANKLIN**

##### ***You Don't Know My Name***

Grant Award: \$30,000

Tommy Franklin (he/him/his) is a filmmaker, writer, producer, creator of ***Weapon of Choice*** Podcast, and Founder of Special Menu Productions. Franklin is a 2020 Sundance Short Documentary Film Fund Grantee, 2020 Kartemquin Films

Diverse Voices in Docs Fellow, 2020 Saint Paul Neighborhood Network New Angle Fellow, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council 2020 Next Step Awardee, and was a finalist for the 2021 Sundance Institute Episodic Lab. He collaborates in philanthropic and grassroots organizing communities to produce content he believes in, indiscriminate of form or medium. As a survivor of incarceration (born in prison and having served time as an adult), Franklin's creative work radically reimagines power structures across issues while advocating for criminal legal reform and visions for Black liberation.

***You Don't Know My Name*** follows a filmmaker's search for the identity of his incarcerated mother, from whom he was separated at birth. As he uncovers deep ancestral bloodlines and moves closer to this life-altering truth, he must navigate his way through systems designed to keep him in the dark. In the making of this film, Franklin has spent time with incarcerated mothers who have given birth in prison. These conversations hold up mirrors of wonderment, curiosity, and hope for all parties involved—and offer openings into the haunting and complicated world of prison and post-prison life.



Photo by Tinker Yan.

#### **TAHIEL JIMENEZ MEDINA**

##### ***My Mama Can't Swim***

Grant Award: \$30,000

Tahiel Jimenez Medina (he, him his; they, them, theirs) is a Colombian first-generation immigrant director. He tells stories in dedication to migrant mamas. His films about immigrant and Colombian culture are catalysts for decolonization, remembering and healing ancestral wounds, infusing themes

of survival, memory and dreams with hauntingly evocative imagery. Medina has presented his films at national and international film festivals—and in local parking lots—for his community to gather and dream of new worlds. His recent awards include Twin Cities Public Television's 2020 Project, The Next Step Grant, the Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant, and Saint Paul Neighborhood Network's New Angle Fellowship.

***My Mama Can't Swim*** is a short narrative film about the fragile and inseparable spiritual bond between an immigrant mother and her son. The film moves between memories that scarred their relationship and a magical pond where they hold one another's vulnerable hearts afloat.



Photo by Erin Gleeson

## SHEN XIN

***Solar Wheels of the Steppes*** (working title)

Grant Award: \$30,000

Shen Xin (she, her, hers; they, them, theirs) creates moving image installations and performances that empower alternative histories, relations and potentials between individuals and nation-states. They seek to create affirmative spaces of belonging that embrace polyphonic narratives and identities.

Shen Xin's most recent solo presentations include ***Swiss Institute, New York*** (forthcoming 2022) and ***Brine Lake (A New Body)*** (Walker Art Center, 2021). Their recent group exhibitions include ***Language is a River*** (Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), Melbourne, 2021), ***Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning*** (Gwangju Biennale, 2021), ***Sigg Prize*** (M+ Museum, Hong Kong, 2019), and ***Songs for Sabotage*** (New Museum Triennial, New York, 2018). They received the BALTIC Artists' Award (2017) and the Rijksakademie residency in Amsterdam (2018-19).

A relational film, ***Solar Wheels of the Steppes*** (working title), presents a science fiction narrative of wild horses in North America/Turtle Island and Xinjiang, China. The horses' relationships with technologies, ecosystems, humans, and land reveal sustainable interrelationships between culture and ecology across geography.



## RHIANA YAZZIE

***Wounspe Wankatya: A College Education***

Grant Award: \$30,000

Rhiana Yazzie (she, her, hers) is a director, filmmaker, and the Artistic Director of New Native Theatre. Her first feature film, ***A Winter Love*** (writer/director/producer/actor), will premiere at festivals in 2021/22. Yazzie is a 2021 Lanford Wilson and 2020

Steinberg Award-winning playwright. She was a 2018 Bush Foundation Leadership Fellow and was recognized with a 2017 Sally Ordway Award for Vision. A Navajo Nation citizen, her work has been presented from Alaska to Mexico, including Carnegie Hall's collaboration with American Indian Community House and The Eagle Project. She is a graduate of the University of Southern California's Masters of Professional Writing, where she produced events featuring Stephen Hawking, Madeleine Albright, Paula Vogel, Herbie Hancock, and Spalding Gray.

Grant funds will begin the production process of Yazzie's second feature film, ***Wounspe Wankatya: A College Education***. Co-adapted from a play of the same name by Alex Hesbrook Ramier, it is the story of two Lakota women, Tiffany and Tashina, the only two from their reservation high school to make it into college. Tiffany is a math and physics genius who sabotages her gifts by partying too much, while Tashina is indigi-genius at being true to her Lakota traditions when she isn't suffering from depression. To get an education, they embark on the creation of a sacred dress that will bring the enlightenment they need to get through school.

## Minnesota Artist Development Grantees

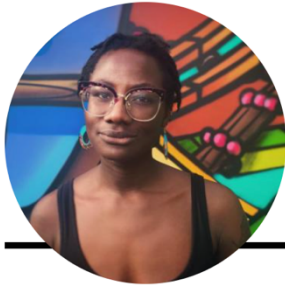


Photo by Raven Jackson.

### RAVEN JOHNSON

***Ruby: Portrait of a Black Teen in an American Suburb*** (working title)

Grant Award: \$7,000

Liberian-American filmmaker Raven Johnson's (she/her/hers) work deals with the realities of Black experiences in White spaces. Originally from Minnesota, she graduated with her MFA from NYU's Tisch Graduate Film program and was recently named filmmaker-in-residence at Augsburg University in Minneapolis. Johnson is a 2021 Jerome Emerging Artist-in-Residence at the Anderson Center at Tower View and was recipient of the 2019 Cannes Film Festival's Cinéfondation Residence in Paris. In 2017, Johnson was named one of AT&T's Emerging Filmmakers for her short film, ***TWEEN***. She is currently developing her first feature film, ***Ruby: Portrait of a Black Teen in an American Suburb*** (working title).

***Ruby: Portrait of a Black Teen in an American Suburb*** (working title) is a coming-of-age tale about Ruby, a 16-year-old, second-generation Liberian immigrant living in a predominately white suburb outside of Minneapolis. Set in the summer of 2020 during the racial justice protest over the murder of George Floyd and at the height of Covid-19 pandemic, Ruby must deal with her immigrant parents' impending divorce and the breakup with her closest friend.



Photo by Atlas O. Phoenix.

### ATLAS O. PHOENIX

***Beautiful Boi***

Grant Award: \$7,000

Atlas O. Phoenix (they/them/theirs) is a director, writer, producer, actor, and editor. "At this point in my filmmaking journey, as I embrace becoming trans-masculine, at 50, I want to create films that not only explore the darkness of the soul; I want to examine its flight to the light. Queer filmmakers are an enormous inspiration to me because our stories are powerful and are about overcoming obscene social obstacles based on our sexual orientation and gender expression. For some, this includes a radical bias towards the color of our skin. If we are vigilant about rejecting tropes, cliches, and tokenism, queer cinema will continue to evolve into a powerful and inspiring force for good in the world."

***Beautiful Boi*** is an experimental, narrative documentary. This genre-bending film is about Phoenix' transition at 50 and their mental health journey over 34 years. As Phoenix transitions, they have many questions that range from being seen by men as a potential threat to questioning their spirituality. Their experience with the surgeries and hormone replacement therapy are part of the journey, but not the whole journey. Phoenix shares their gender transition to create a legacy of this mental, physical, sexual, and spiritual journey. This legacy may be someone else's survival guide.



Photo by Spencer Nelson.

## MARIBETH ROMSLO

***Growing Up In A Pandemic*** (Animated Audio Stories)

Grant Award: \$7,000

Maribeth Romslo (she/her/hers) is a director, cinematographer, and producer who believes that well-told stories have the power to change the world. Her films have played at festivals from Toronto to Mumbai. Recent projects include an original documentary series (***Handmade\*Mostly***) for Reese Witherspoon’s new media platform called Hello Sunshine; a conceptual dance film (***Kitchen Dance***) about the work of women; a historical fiction content series (***Spark***) to inspire girls interested in STEM; and a documentary about student free-speech in America (***Raise Your Voice***).

***Growing Up In A Pandemic*** is a multimedia storytelling project that focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth. The project pairs audio stories told by youth with animation that supports and enhances the content of the stories.



Photo by Katherina Vang.

## KAZUA MELISSA VANG

***The Chaperone***

Grant Award: \$7,000

Kazua Melissa Vang (she/her/hers) is a Hmong American filmmaker, photographer, teaching artist, and producer based in Minnesota. Vang production-managed ***Nice***, an independent pilot, and official selection for the Indie Episodic Category at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival. She co-founded the Asian Pacific Island American Minnesota Film Collective (APIA MN Film Collective). Her first short film, ***Rhaub***, was an official selection at the 2018 Qhia Dab Neeg Film Festival in Saint Paul, MN. Vang received the Forecast Public Art Early-Career Artist Project Grant and developed a short experimental film, ***Hmong Ephemera***, as a writer/director. She is a producer for ***Hmong Organization***, a comedic web series.

***The Chaperone*** is a semi-autobiographical comedic short film that follows Ghia Na, a teen who must accompany her older sister Hlee Anne when they are out of the house. Ghia Na serves as the chaperone while Hlee Anne rendezvous with her boyfriend in the park. Set amidst the backdrop of the mid-90s and the strict rules that governed Hmong girls’ bodies, this film follows Ghia Na as she befriends other “younger sister” chaperones.



## Minnesota Production Finalists



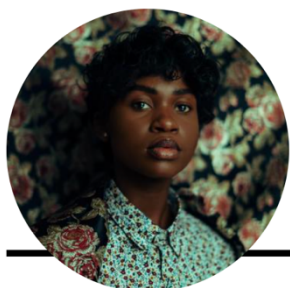
### JOUA LEE GRANDE

#### *Spirited*

Finalist Award: \$5,000

Joua Lee Grande (she, her, hers) is a Minneapolis-based filmmaker determined to shed light on underrepresented experiences and truths. She has produced various short documentaries and is currently in development for her first feature, *Spirited*. Grande is currently a Jerome Hill Artist Fellow and a MediaJustice Network Fellow. She was a 2019 Kartemquin Films Diverse Voices in Docs Fellow and previously worked as a news editor at WCCO TV 4 News. Grande is a part of various film networks, including the Asian American Documentary Network and Brown Girls Doc Mafia. She spent the past four years shaping media education programs at the Saint Paul Neighborhood Network and has developed and taught media and arts programming at institutions across Minnesota.

Joua Lee Grande is working on *Spirited*, a feature-length documentary about her journey as an Americanized, agnostic Hmong American woman exploring her people's spiritual practice after being told by various shamans that she is destined to become a shaman. A dive into the second generation's experience trying to save this ancient practice while making it their own, the film explores various shaman's experiences in modern-day America. It explores how this spiritual practice exists in multi-racial families, diverse communities, the first generation with out and proud LGBTQ+ community members, and women coming into their power in a patriarchal culture.



### EFFY KAWIRA

#### *Apartment 208*

Finalist Award: \$5,000

Photo by Bobby Rogers.

Kenyan native Effy Kawira (she, her, hers) began producing short films and music videos, leading her to directing and writing films. Her propulsive passion for storytelling is the driving force behind every project, and her versatility the key to adapting and collaborating with a diverse range of creatives. Kawira is dedicated to telling the stories of those who may feel voiceless and unheard. She seeks to execute content that mesmerizes the audience and aims propel the change for more representation of various communities in the media.

*Apartment 208* follows the story of Isabelle Ibrahim: a young, bright-eyed, passionate yet guarded 23-year-old photographer on her search for a fresh start after a series of unfortunate mishaps in her life. She moves into an apartment of her own, marking a new beginning in her adulthood and her journey of self-love and independence. During a long day of moving, Isabelle has a fated encounter with her neighbor from the unit above, 26-year-old Ahmad, a kind and mild-mannered young military soldier. The two end up in a whirlwind of romance, and their relationship progresses rather quickly. However, it all comes to an abrupt end when Ahmad is murdered.



## DEACON WARNER

### *Rethinking Security*

Finalist Award: \$5,000

Deacon Warner (he, him, his) is a documentary filmmaker and youth media instructor. In 2020 he joined the COMPAS roster of teaching artists. Warner has made numerous short documentaries, including *Bee-Sharp Honeybee*, *56*, and *Peaceful Warriors: on the road with Vets for Peace*. *The Co-op Wars*, his first feature film, premiered in May 2021. In addition to his independent film work and teaching, Warner was the Youth Programs Director at FilmNorth for twelve years, developing the media program to include in-school residencies, summer camps, and after-school programming. Before working at FilmNorth, he was a social studies teacher in the Minneapolis Public Schools.

*Rethinking Security* is a documentary film about a community creating a nonviolent model for safety. With the guidance and expertise of Nonviolent Peaceforce (N.P.), community groups and social justice organizations in the Twin Cities are actively creating a force of community members trained in nonviolent strategies to provide community protection. This effort was set off by the protests and conflicts following George Floyd's murder amidst a global pandemic. N.P. and local partners in the Twin Cities are developing trained volunteers and a communication system allowing rapid responses when violent situations emerge. This film will use verité style footage, following the efforts of the lead organizers, along with news reportage as context for events. *Rethinking Security* offers a look at a possible future where mutual protection and nonviolence replace our current model of armed protection.

## Minnesota Artist Development Finalists



## JOHN MBANDA

### *Red Earth*

Finalist Award: \$2,500

John Mbanda (he, him, his) is a Rwandan-American filmmaker and an ex-refugee. Mbanda lives and works in Minneapolis, Portland, and Kigali, attempting to tell stories of the unheard in a documentary format. The 20-year-old is currently working on a full-length documentary that tells the story of a Rwandan refugee family assimilating to the west. The film follows the family's journey, highlighting the challenges that come with assimilation.

*Red Earth* is a full-length, featured documentary that tells the story of a Rwandan refugee family that is relocating to the west through a lottery.



## DAN YANG

### Untitled Project

Finalist Award: \$2,500

Dan Yang (he, him, his) is a filmmaker, teacher, and community activist. He believes that films have an active influence on the social-cultural issues that surround our everyday lives. He is a proud 2016 graduate of Columbia College in Chicago, where he studied directing. Yang has produced short films such as **Rice Street** and **Spirits Dawn**. He hopes to continue creating films that challenge social norms, speaking to issues such as cultural dysphoria and identity issues. Yang is a member of InProgress, where he mentors students on video production. He is a recipient of the Cultural Stars Grant as well as the Minnesota State Arts Board Grant.

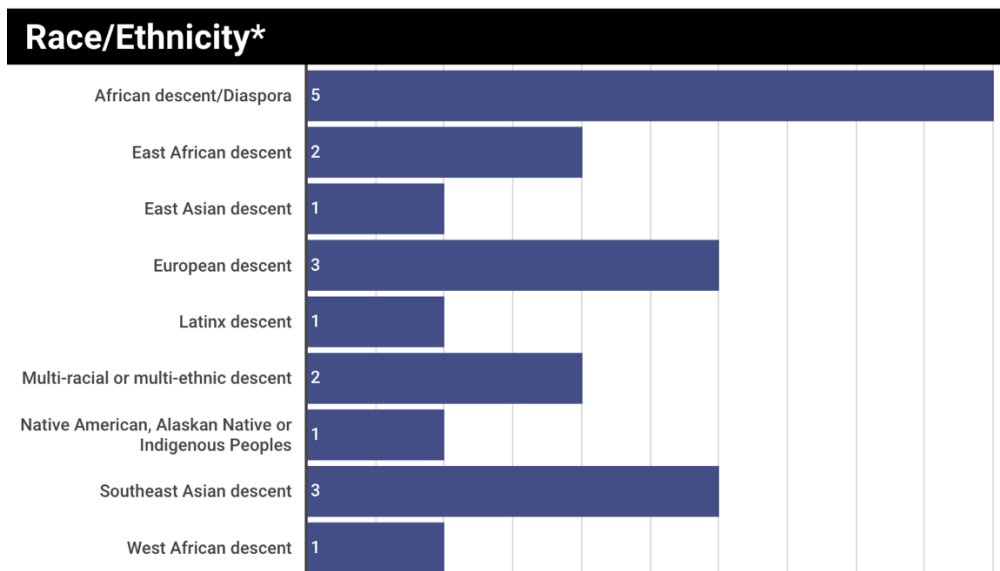
Currently, Yang is working on an untitled film based on the unfortunate and true events of Fong Lee and his encounter with officer Jason Anderson on July 22nd, 2006. It begins like any ordinary day within a Hmong household, Fong the middle child in a family of 6, is a reserved and quiet teen. Like any other day, Fong and his friends bike to the local elementary school where he is approached by Officer Anderson. This encounter leads to a foot chase and the eventual shooting of Fong Lee.

## COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Jerome Foundation examines its grantmaking through an equity, diversity and inclusivity lens to ensure our commitment to EDI is realized in action. The demographics we are attentive to include race, gender, sexuality, generation and physical ability. Information about this round of grantees and finalists, along with panelists, follows and is also available [on our website](#).

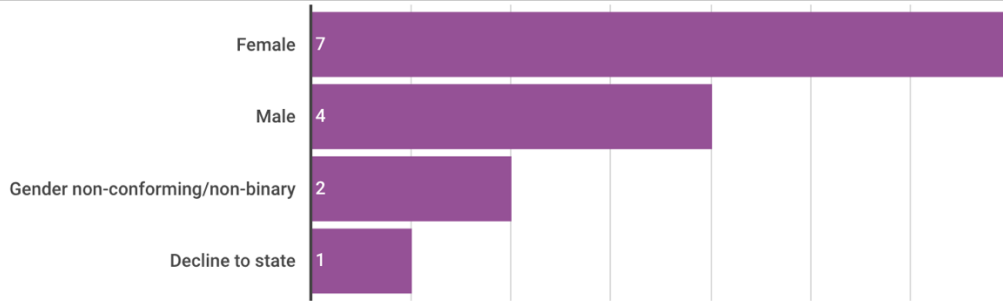
### 2021 Minnesota Grantees and Finalists by...

\* respondents could select more than one identifier

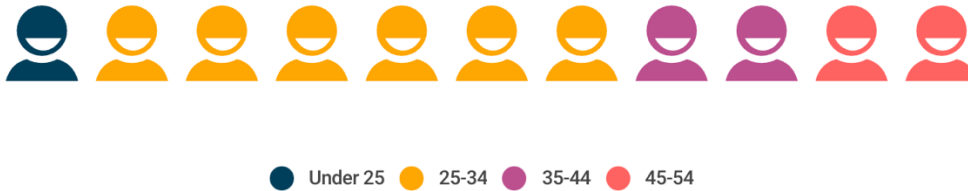




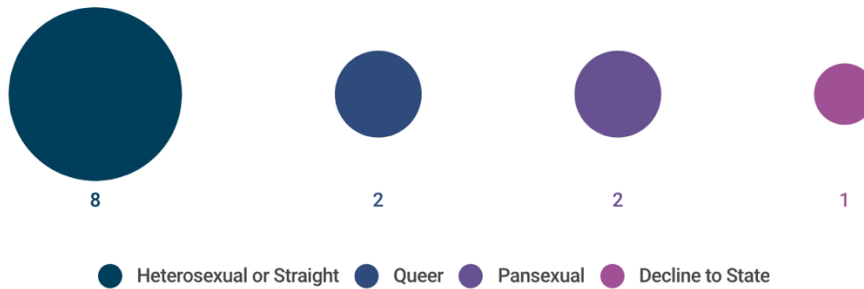
## Gender\*



## Age



## Sexuality\*

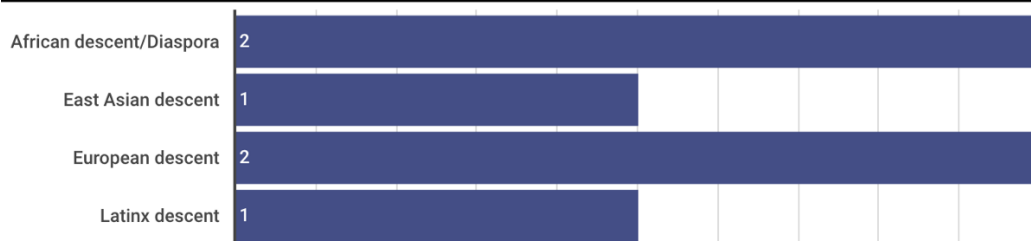


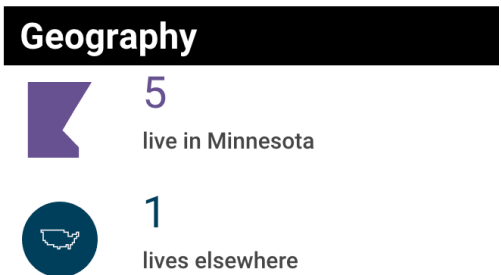
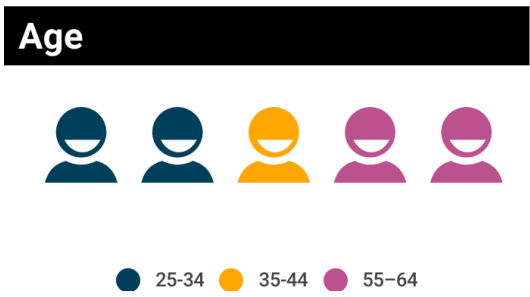
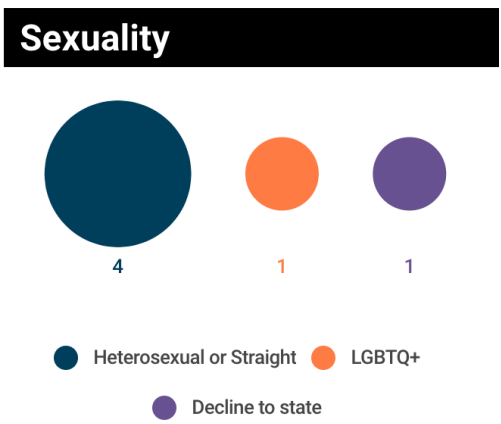
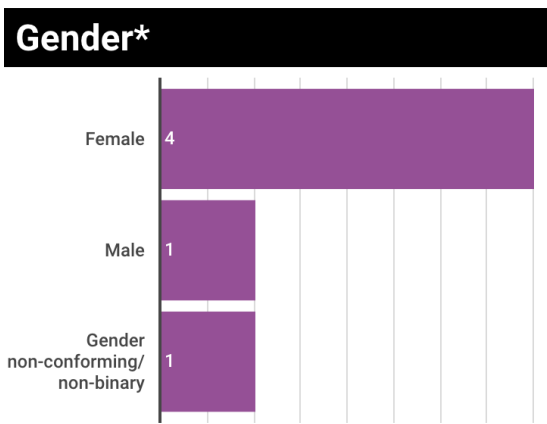
One grantee/finalist is transgender.  
 One grantee/finalist is part of the disability community.

## 2021 Minnesota Panelists by...

\* respondents could select more than one identifier

## Race/Ethnicity\*





One panelist is transgender.  
 One panelist is part of the disability community.

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For downloadable images, go to <https://www.jeromefdn.org/logos>. Individual artist images are available upon request.

**ABOUT THE JEROME FOUNDATION**  
 The Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship is named for Jerome Hill (1905-72), an Academy Award-winning filmmaker, painter, photographer, composer, and supporter of the arts and artists. Throughout his life, he offered financial assistance to numerous artists and humanists to continue their work and in 1964 created what is today known as the Jerome Foundation.

Today, the Foundation seeks to contribute to a dynamic and evolving culture by supporting the creation, development, and production of new works by early career/emerging artists. It focuses resources on grants to early career artists and those nonprofit arts organizations that serve them in the state of Minnesota and in the five boroughs of New York City.