

Tribe selects five artistic fellows

By Danielle Harrison

Smoke Signals assistant editor/staff writer

Five Northwest Native American artists, who work in various mediums, have been selected for the 2023 Indigenous Place Keeping Artist Fellowship, including Grand Ronde Tribal member Steph Littlebird Fogel.

The fellowship was created in 2022 and provides up to \$20,000 to each selected artist. It was created to develop Indigenous artist capacity within the Grand Ronde Tribe's homelands and to help the fellows become more competitive for local, regional and nationwide funding opportunities.



Steph Littlebird Fogel

The fellowships are open to individuals who demonstrate a verifiable Indigenous connection to ancestral peoples of western Oregon from the lower Columbia River in the north

to the Klamath River in the south.

Fellows are selected based on available funding and the fellowship is administered by the Tribe's Cultural Resources Department.

The selection panel includes Grand Ronde Tribal Council member Lisa Leno, Chachalu Manager Travis Stewart, Grand Ronde Cultural Policy Analyst Greg Archuleta, Oregon Arts Commission member Liora Sponka and Meyer Memorial Trust member Stone Hudson. Cultural Resources Department Manager David Harrelson is the fellowship administrator.

"Art by Indigenous people is one of the most effective and recognizable ways that we, as Indigenous people of place, can hold a place in our homelands and further our own recognition and persistence," Harrelson said. "Indigenous Place Keeping work can be a unifier as it informs the very identity of places and practices no matter a person's connection.

"I have immense gratitude to the Grand Ronde Tribal Council, our funding partners, Meyer Memorial Trust and Oregon Community Foundation, as well as our artist residency partners: Sitka Center for Arts and Ecology and Oregon State University's Patricia Valian Reser Center for the Creative Arts in making the IPKA Fellowship in 2022 and 2023 a well-supported opportunity for indigenous artists. The fellowship includes funding for a season of work, lodging and opportunities to connect with fellow creatives."

In January, Tribal Council approved accepting an \$113,972 grant from Meyer Memorial Trust to help fund the fellowships.

After the fellowship with Grand Ronde is complete, all fellows will have an offer of two-week artist residencies at Sitka Center for Arts and Ecology in Otis, Harrelson added. Additionally, other artist residency opportunities may be available through Oregon State University's Patricia Valian Reser Center for the Creative Arts programs.

Fellows

The 2023 fellows are Fogel, Amber Kay Ball (Siletz), Joseph Scott (Siletz), Shirod Younker (Coquille) and Lofanitani Aisea (Tongan, Modoc, Klamath and Tahlequah).

Fogel works as a painter, writer, curator and illustrator. She applied for the fellowship because

her "highest purpose" as an artist is serving her Tribal community.

"The IPKA fellowship will enable me to focus on a project that is specifically made for my Grand Ronde community, which is a dream come true," she said.

During the year-long fellowship, Fogel will be writing and illustrating a children's book based on the Tribe's ikanum stories, which will feature both English and Chinook Wawa translations.

"As a younger Native person I noticed there was a lack of representation of Indigenous people in media and books," Fogel said. "It's my goal to help change that and create more materials for our community that uplifts and celebrates our culture. ... I am excited to use my skills as a digital illustrator and author to create something that is specifically for our unique Tribal community. I'm looking forward to producing a complete book and story that our students can learn and understand more about themselves, their ancestors and our culture."

Ball works as a theater writer/director and currently serves as executive office coordinator and special projects liaison for the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, and also works as remote executive director of In the Margin, based in Sacramento, Calif.

She recently collaborated with Fogel on "This IS Kalapuyan Land at Pittock Mansion," a group exhibition at the Pittock Mansion in Portland that runs through the end of July. The exhibit features historical panels sharing accurate representations of Indigenous people's continued presence in the area, as well as contemporary Indigenous artwork.

"In hearing about this fellowship it felt like a beautiful opportunity to bring together my art making and ancestral knowledge for new play development," Ball said. "I applied for this fellowship as I want to be a champion of my own work and story. This fellowship is special in



Amber Kay Ball

the support of Indigenous knowledge and art making – to be a part of this amazing cohort of artists creating work in connection with space and place is such a special honor."

Ball plans to develop a one-act play centered on a family's story of removal from their traditional homelands and the ripples of devastation through time. She describes it as a "new-age; post-grunge; alt-Native comedy."

"This work is important and exciting to me as I know many generationally will resonate in the genre and aesthetic of 'alternative,'" she said.



Joseph Scott

"By choosing a play with elements of comedy, tragedy and love, I can share a story showing the fullness of my Native heritage and legacy."

Scott works as a program director for the Traditional Ecological Inquiry Program, where he teaches Trib-

al youth, families and communities. He also works as a Tribal language curriculum consultant for Betterment Labs.

His artistic medium has included everything from "B-movies to raku pottery." During the fellowship, he'll explore the "craft and beauty" of Indigenous fire ecology as a way of life.

"There is a rhythm to the cycle of the Tribal seasonal rounds, and inherent beauty in the role of fire as the land and people shape each other," Scott said. "I think I can see some of that and I think I can share what I see. My ancestors are from the Rogue River Tribes. In spite of removal, I believe our songs, ceremonies and ceremonial objects send us a long connection back to our homeland through deep ancestral understanding of the area's ecology. ... Hopefully there will be new songs and other good words. Then, ideally, the community will tell the story."



Shirod Younker

Younker works as a Tribal Youth Water Summit director and has mentored others as a Tribal carver for several years. For

the fellowship, Younker will focus on carved artifacts.

"Off and on for the last several years, (I) have been discussing with cultural administrators from Southern Oregon about the lack of cultural artifacts in our area. (I) figured this would help give me some time to find out what's out there."

During the fellowship, he will be researching museum repositories to document what ancestors left behind, mainly researching a medium to help facilitate traditional wood carving, if possible.

"(I) hope to use the collected data to present to other Tribal carvers to see if we can start a movement to perpetuate traditional carving that's uniquely tied to both our geography and ancestors," Younker said. "Our art forms help inform us of the values of ancestors, so it's only right that if we are in the process of making our communities whole again, that we take a good look to find,



Lofanitani Aisea

replicate and put into practice the art forms that epitomized their philosophies and principles."

Aisea is the founder and digital creator of Lofanitani LLC and also works as a production assistant for Warner Brothers Production & Apple TV.

"Art has been a tool that I, my people, and my ancestors have used to survive," she said in her artist portfolio introduction. "I truly believe Indigenous art is vital to the survival and thriving of our communities. Creating art, claiming space, building community, and pushing the boundaries of what Natives can have always (has) been what my life has been about. Telling stories brings me joy. I make films and series on my ancestral homelands with our community that explore the raw and rigid beauties of place-based Indigenous storytelling through horror, comedy and drama." ■



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