

# Creative Community Fellows

New England

2023

## Meet The Fellows



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# Meet the Fellows

Click on a fellow to learn more



**Carolina Aragon**  
Florence, MA



**Juanita Austin**  
New Haven, CT



**Xochi Cartland**  
Auburn, ME



**Janelle Codianni**  
Providence, RI



**Josh Croke**  
Worcester, MA



**Emilia Dahlin**  
Gorham, ME



**Pampi Das**  
Simsbury, CT



**René Goddess**  
Portland, ME



**Ozzy Gold-Shapiro**  
Northampton, MA



**Jeff Kasper**  
Northampton, MA



**Katherine Leung**  
Milton, VT



**Amyas McKnight**  
Boston, MA



**Christy Mihaly**  
East Calais, VT



**Nadine Nelson**  
Hamden, CT



**Randall Nielsen**  
Manchester, NH



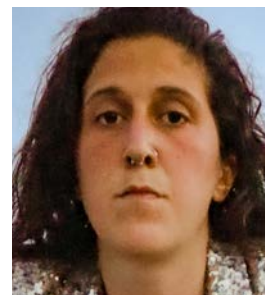
**Dani Robbins**  
Bar Harbor, ME



**Merrilee Schoen**  
Bangor, ME



**Ellen Smith Ahern**  
Lebanon, NH



**Jess Sweeney**  
North Adams, MA



**Dan Wenger**  
Camden, ME



## Carolina Aragon

Florence, MA

she/her

Carolina Aragon is an associate professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the director of Art for Public Good Group. Her award-winning creative work blends artistry and transdisciplinary practices that bring together research, craft, and community engagement to address issues of climate change and environmental justice.

In 2021, her FutureSHORELINE project was awarded the Climate Change Communication Award “Rebecca Ballestra” by the Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change. Carolina was named as one of the top 25 Creative Revolutionaries by the CODAworx organization in 2020. Her artwork has been displayed at the World Bank’s Art of Resilience Exhibition 2019 in Washington, DC, as well as showcased in multiple venues,

including the U.S. National Park Service’s video: 100 Years of Arts in the Parks.

Carolina lives in Northampton with her two children, and her cat. She loves to host dinners, sew, bake, and make beautiful things. Her greatest joy is the friendships and deep personal connections she has developed through her art projects and her teaching career.

### About Art for Public Good Group

This project supports the creation of a new artistic practice, the Art for Public Good Group, which aims to positively impact communities affected by climate change and environmental justice issues. The group will seek to make scientific information about local environmental conditions more accessible and connect the general public to actionable paths for improvement of such conditions. Unique to the group is the process of engaging with scientists, community groups, civic agencies, and youth organizations in the co-creation of the art projects.

### Find Me

[www.carolinaaragon.com](http://www.carolinaaragon.com); @CarolinaAragonV



## Juanita Austin

New Haven, CT

she/her

Juanita “Sunday” Austin is a cultural producer and curator originally from New London, Connecticut. She received her B.A. in Digital Media & Design with a concentration in Interactive Media Design from the University of Connecticut and has been a leader in various grassroots community arts initiatives. Currently, she is the founder of Cultured AF, an arts organization that supports underrepresented artists, particularly Black and Queer individuals, and strives to create safe and equitable spaces for their work to thrive.

With over five years of experience work in the arts, Juanita has recently moved to New Haven where she now works as the Producer for the International Festival of Arts and Ideas. Additionally, she serves as the Special Events Producer for

the CT Office of the Arts where she hosts the Talking Artists Series, and she is a producer for New Haven’s Kulturelly LIT. Juanita’s personal projects include curating and producing 6th Dimension, an Afrofuturistic Arts Festival opening in New Haven later this year.

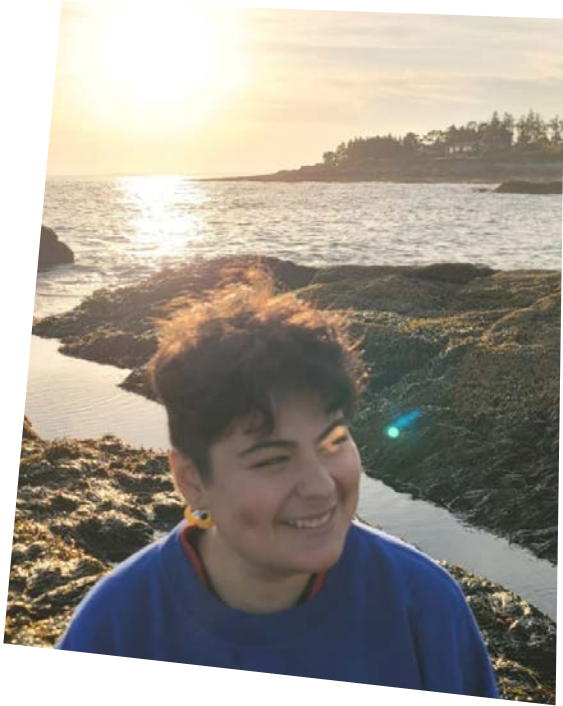
### About 6th Dimension

6th Dimension is a city-wide Afrofuturist arts festival in New Haven/Hamden from August 26 through October 21, 2023. Through a series of exhibitions and programs in association with community partners across New Haven, this festival explores Afrofuturism in all its intersections of visual art, performance, technology, literature and innovation. The two-month experience includes an immersive exhibition, satellite galleries, public art, a one-day summit, plus community programs and pop-up events.

### Find Me

IG: @curator.nita, @6thdimensionfest | [www.6thdimension.net](http://www.6thdimension.net)





## Xochi Cartland

Auburn, ME

she/they

Xochi Cartland is a latina & queer poet, seamstress, & transformative justice practitioner. Originally from Silver Spring, Maryland, they lived in Providence for five years, during which time they received their BA in Literary Arts from Brown University. Since graduating, they have moved to Auburn, Maine, where they have deepened their love of trees and learned to bake pretzels. Xochi's work is rooted in both place and imagination - how can we imagine a livable world, not just a survivable one? What is a community of loving accountability, and how can we practice it with each other? Using poetry, performance, and fabric as their primary mediums, Xochi translates care work into an artistic experience.

### **About abolition&art: building adaptable futures**

My project aims to engage folks in personal and communal skill building around radical care. In a small cohort group of 10 people, we will be using mediums such as painting, poetry, woodworking, and sewing to build out our skill sets in transformative justice, crisis response, supporting survivors, nonviolent communication, and conflict de-escalation. Art has been critical throughout history to tell different stories of resistance, and we will be looking at the work of Keith Haring, Theaster Gates, Diego Rivera, Layli Long Soldier, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, among others', to see how we can use art to interrupt, minimize, and respond to harm when it occurs. In this way, we will be building grassroots responses to strengthen our community's capacity to care for one another, collectively learning how to be in right relationship with ourselves and the world.

### **Find Me**

website: [abolitionand.org](http://abolitionand.org) | instagram: y.las.maravillas



## Jannelle Codianni

Providence, RI

she/her

Jannelle Codianni serves as the Executive Director of atac, a community-centered visual and performing arts nonprofit in Framingham, MA. She spends the bulk of her non-work time guiding her two teenage daughters into adulthood and watching as they do the young adult version of riding off without training wheels: wobbly, elated, and leaving you in the dust. She is an award-winning storyteller with twenty years experience speaking to shame, truth, sexuality, and relationship. Jannelle has been a handywoman for hire, a community educator, a small-scale homesteader, and an unimpressive-record-setting powerlifter. In her 30s, she learned how to accept love and has been enjoying the outcomes with her beloved partner for nearly four years. Jannelle's life pivots around the craft of space-making, both physical and emotional. She graduated from The

Massachusetts College of Art's legendary major, The Studio for Interrelated Media (SIM), where she learned how to perform, produce and sit calmly through criticism.

### About Full Circle Access

Full Circle Access is a free live music series providing accessible, culturally relevant programming while creating job training and employment opportunities for local youth, the surrounding immigrant population, and other individuals entering or re-entering the workforce. This project responds to community and organizational needs, cultural expectations, and institutional lack of access to the arts. While these are specific issues with various root causes and impacts, I hope to create an incorporated and empowered structure within atac to address these challenges and structural barriers.

### Find Me

Instagram: @camper\_empress

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## Josh Croke

they/them

Worcester, MA

Josh is a queer and nonbinary equity-centered community designer, facilitator, and artist passionate about cultivating sustainable and thriving futures. They are the founder of Action! by Design, a mission-driven consultancy supporting community growth and change through art, media, and design; the president and cofounder of Love Your Labels, a nonprofit supporting LGBTQ+ youth through art, fashion, and design; and a Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) Fellow at MassDevelopment supporting equitable development in Springfield, MA.

With a vision for an equitable, just, and joyful world, Josh uses design thinking, inclusive facilitation, and mixed media storytelling to connect people to their communities in ways that

bring joy, belonging, and success. Accolades include being named to the Worcester Business Journal's (WBJ) Central MA Power 50 (2023), BEQ Pride Magazine's LGBT Leaders Under 40 (2020), WBJ's 40 Under 40 (2019), and Boston Spirit Magazine's 30 Under 30 Young Trailblazers (2017).

When not working on the above, Josh enjoys making art, watching sci-fi TV, and thinking about the future of humanity. Josh has been involved in many artistic projects over the years, including being a founding director of POW! WOW! Worcester—a large mural arts festival, planning creative pop-up events, and steering creative placemaking projects, such as bringing the first parklet to Worcester.

### About Love Your Labels

The pilot project I am proposing is an expansion of Love Your Labels' Threads Program, which empowers high school-age LGBTQ+ youth to explore and express their identities through fashion design. The project aims to open a physical space for the Threads Program, with a front-of-house tailoring and thrift shop focused on gender-affirming clothing and a back sewing studio for the program. The project will also launch an online apparel brand that includes skills training for LGBTQ+ individuals on running a company. The goal of the project is to provide a safe and affirming community where LGBTQ+ youth can connect, build lasting relationships, and gain valuable life skills while promoting inclusivity, creativity, and empowerment.

### Find Me

IG: @Joshua.Croke @Love.Your.Labels @ActionDesignCo // Twitter: @JoshuaCroke @ActionDesignCo @PublicHearing // [JoshuaCroke.com](https://joshuacroke.com); [ActionByDesign.co](https://ActionByDesign.co); [LoveYourLabels.org](https://LoveYourLabels.org) // I can also be found on LinkedIn!



## Emilia Dahlin

Gorham, ME

she/her/they

Emilia Dahlin is an award-winning singer/songwriter and teaching artist who believes that stories and songs are some of the most powerful tools to connect us and foster positive change.

Emilia traversed the U.S. while touring for a decade, was part of the founding team of Rippleeffect (an outdoor experiential non-profit, that still serves thousands of children each year off their island base in Casco Bay), and SPACE gallery (an alternative arts space in Portland), and spent a year-long pilgrimage visiting intentional communities across the globe. She's deeply committed to exploring and supporting ways that community heals and nurtures us and is interested in social experiments that challenge our status quo.

Emilia's a mother, gardener, change-maker, artist, hugger, and outdoor enthusiast who loves to dance and sing as well as make order from chaos. She feels at home cooking for and feeding people and is very happy in water or moving at "human speed" on a bike or in a boat.

### About Sing Me A Story

Sing Me A Story is a professional development curriculum, workshop, and resource for early childhood educators and children's librarians who'd like to enliven, strengthen, and widen their teaching and programming with song. Through the power of singing we can foster a sense of belonging, social emotional learning, language acquisition, and early literacy skills.

### Find Me

[www.emiliadahlin.com](http://www.emiliadahlin.com); [www.instagram.com/emilia\\_dahlin](https://www.instagram.com/emilia_dahlin); [www.facebook.com/emilia.dahlin.music](https://www.facebook.com/emilia.dahlin.music)





## Pampi Das

Simsbury, CT

they/them

A 36+ year newcomer-settler of Turtle Island, Pampi is a darker-skinned nonbinary second-genx casteD-Bengali culture worker who develops community-centered art that releases creative potential and drives change-making. Since 2009, they began devoting all their pursuits singularly to community efforts and began creating participatory programming with community, applying the expressive arts and popular education to champion liberatory organizing efforts and to locally demonstrate the critical role of the folk arts in community building. They lean on poetry, dance theater and gardening to help message the intersectional shifts in thinking we must embrace to center liberation. Pampi is a dynamic resourceful facilitator with a talent for translating dense data into accessible popular education installations.

### About Neighborhood Grow Plan

A pollinator group, Neighborhood Grow Plan encourages and supports families renting in multiple places across New England to grow food where we live: we frame needs faced by redlined communities as civil and human rights by social contract and confront the reality that they are not so by working to establish through practices in reciprocity that growing plants model for us ways to fortify our neighborhoods. Through culture making with and in community we strive to empower each other to vision beyond security to sovereignty at the intersections of land, food and housing. A cultural strategy, we build at the neighborhood level: NGP addresses the economic gap between food, housing and land security; we tend to access to regular mental and physical wellness; we address isolation through coming together; we grow food acknowledging each other's family histories in growing food; we learn how we have agency and power in securing housing, food, land by breaking class barriers to do so, centering our most marginalized neighbors; we ask how might we invest in each other, applying economic models rooted in mutual aid and worker co-ops.

### Find Me

[linktr.ee/neighborhoodgrowplan](https://linktr.ee/neighborhoodgrowplan); [linktr.ee/pampi](https://linktr.ee/pampi); insta/twitter: @thirdeyefell; hashtags #neighborhoodgrowplan #neighborhoodcultureplan; facebook /das.pampi



## René Goddess

Portland, ME

she/her

René Goddess is Co-Founder & Lead Designer of The Ensemble of Color (TEoC, pronounced TEE-oC) formally Theater Ensemble of Color, and Founder & Lead Consultant of Embodied Equity, a small Healing Arts Center. She is an Eco-Womenist Activist specializing in Social Justice & Racial Equity reform through the Arts. Both organizations fill a cultural and activist niche as sister companies alongside members of our underrepresented communities, to change our outcomes.

TEoC and EE develop and create arts-based activist spaces and projects focused on inter-organizational collaboration, intergenerational healing, and community joy-making.

TEoC & EE are strong unconventional organizations born out of a deep need for play and joy for Black femmes. Founders, Nicole Antonette Chioma, Christina W. Richardson, and I, came together to create an intimate and loving space for play with abandonment. Our art uplifts Black joy to challenge dominant narratives that the Black experience is defined by trauma and violence. We seek to build new narratives that challenge the way whiteness pits Black Femmes against each other. We teach our littles, of all ages, especially girls, the abundance of ways to show intimacy and affection outside of the systems that hypersexualize us.

### About The Ensemble of Color

The creation of an online embodied anti-racist program allows individuals and small or large organizations to engage in anti-racist work rooted in creative play, joy, collective power building, and decolonizing practices. The mobile app is to strengthen anti-racist practices in our homes and communities, to make the Embodied Play Tools easily accessible to target audiences globally, and to foster healthy engagement with mobile devices for young people.

### Find Me

IG: @weareembodiedequity, @teoconwabanakiland



## Ozzy Gold-Shapiro

Northampton, MA

they/he

Ozzy Irving Gold-Shapiro is a curious historian, Yiddishist/ Jewish cultural organizer, performing artist, educator, translator, and raconteur living on Nipmuc, Pocumtuc, and Nonotuck land in so-called western Massachusetts. They orchestrate multigenerational, community-led spectacle theater parades based on Jewish folk art, music, culture, and radical histories through The People’s Puppet Parade. They sing and play ukulele in the klezmer band Burikes and co-organize KlezCummington, a yearly festival dedicated to the creation and deepening of Yiddish diasporic cultures. They have been involved as a researcher, translator, and performer in a number of archival Yiddish-based performance projects that seek to destabilize traditional historical narratives, including Jenny Romaine’s “The Revival of the Gravediggers of Uzda,” A. C.

Weaver’s “Plague Wedding,” and “Vu bistu geven?/Where Have You Been?”. They are also a Jewish educator, teaching lesser-known histories through food and pickling workshops, as well as a bilingual field fellow for the Yiddish Book Center’s Wexler Oral History Project. They have witnessed the power of music and theater in struggles for liberation, and love forging connections, building community on and off the stage, and creating joyous and raucous occasions for local mutual aid work!

### About The People’s Puppet Parade

The People’s Puppet Parade is a twice-yearly parade and spectacle performance that brings together an intergenerational group of community members, performers, artists, musicians, and puppeteers to build large-scale art and create participatory, homegrown theater. Grounded in the rich traditions and radical histories of Jewish folk art, culture, and music, and led by queer and trans community members of all ages, The People’s Puppet Parade aims to bring people out of isolation in order to create meaningful, communal, & accessible spaces for connection, creativity, cultural learning, and expressions of grief and joy that help us realize and embody the world to come!

### Find Me

[www.peoplespuppetparade.weebly.com/](http://www.peoplespuppetparade.weebly.com/)

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## Jeff Kasper

he/him

Northampton, MA

Jeff Kasper is an artist, writer, and educator. He works with the tools and techniques of design, contemplative practices, and community engagement, to create public art, publications, workshops, digital media, and participatory learning projects. His artworks center dialogical, reflective, and instructional texts, as well as pedagogical tools that prompt meditation, relationship building, and serious play. Based on his own lived experiences and observations, much of his recent projects explore topics of social support, safety, and proximity. Through his disability arts organizing, he opens up spaces for (re)imagining accessible and trauma-aware futures and expanding emotional health through creative means. His recent exhibitions have been presented internationally, including with New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, Meta Open Arts,

and Queens Museum, and his past public programs have been facilitated with BRIC, CUE Art Foundation, and moCa Cleveland. Kasper is Assistant Professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the Department of Art.

### About Be Well Western Mass

Jeff Kasper is directing a design team of students, in collaboration with physicians from Baystate Medical Center, psychologists, parents and educators throughout Springfield metropolitan area and The Pioneer Valley region of Western Massachusetts, on an ongoing series of bilingual animated videos. Initiated by Stephen Boos, MD, the community-engaged media prompts healthy child development and family well-being. The project communicates practices crafted by parents, and grounded in science, such as how to deal with the loss of emotional regulation throughout early childhood.

### Find Me

[www.jeffkasper.co](http://www.jeffkasper.co); Instagram: @jeffkasperstudio





## Katherine Leung

Milton, VT

she/her

Katherine Leung is a multidisciplinary artist and organizer in Milton, Vermont. Her background is in education, having taught ESL and/or art at underresourced schools since 2014. She's served many roles in school leadership and teachers' union organizing. Now she co-organizes a Queer Art Club at the Milton Artists' Guild and Cantonese Speaking Club to support AAPI in Vermont. She is the editor of Canto Cutie, an independent art and literature publication focused on Cantonese diasporic creators around the world. Canto Cutie has published six 100+ page magazines, featuring 10+ bilingual interviews and the work of 130+ contributing artists. Canto Cutie has been covered in Seven Days Vermont and Burlington Free Press, and has support from the Vermont Arts Council and National Endowment for the Arts.

### About Cantonese Club

Cantonese Club unites Cantonese-speakers in Vermont with monthly opportunities to practice speaking in a community setting.

Cantonese is a minority language in China predominantly spoken in Hong Kong, facing a sharp decline in speakers through monoculturalism, mass migration, linguistic assimilation, loss of self-determination, and isolation.

I hope to establish school-based support for Cantonese-speaking emigres or develop a scholarship that benefits rural AAPI Vermonters.

I envision a festival that celebrates existing Vermont-Cantonese culture through education and awareness in partnership with local Cantonese-speaking restaurants.

### Find Me

[cantocutie.com](http://cantocutie.com); Instagram/Facebook: @cantocutie

## Amyas McKnight

Boston, MA

he/him

Today, Amyas is no longer interested in becoming a rapper specifically however he continuously flirts with being a hardcore vocalist with hip-hop, punk, opera, funk, and heavy metal influences.

His passion is to combine engineering, entertainment, education, and urban planning so that he can be a part of the creative solutions for socioeconomic challenges in his community.

Fortunately, he has been doing exactly this in real life.

There was a time when he thought engineering was just about making products and commercial goods for consumers which

did not align with his passions. Luckily, he came across and later joined “Engineers Without Borders”.

Initially this was so that he could gain experience in civil & facilities engineering, but what he quickly realized was that he could apply his engineering skills in developing nations and developing neighborhoods to increase the quality of life of these people.

### About Dorchester Art Project

I’m transforming Dorchester Art Project into a community resource that is managed by indigenous leadership reflective of the people from that community. The model for this is a multi-stakeholder cooperative organization. This cooperative organization aims to bring a solidarity economy to the arts and culture sector. This cooperative organization acts as a servant leader for creatives of color.

### Find Me

IG: [dorchesterartproject](#); [whatshappening\\_boston](#); LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/in/amyas-mcknight-7563a5149](http://www.linkedin.com/in/amyas-mcknight-7563a5149)





## Christy Mihaly

East Calais, VT

she/her

Christy Mihaly is a children’s author and poet. She writes for kids because she believes that our best hope for the future is raising young people who love to read, and giving them the knowledge and skills to lead. Christy has published more than thirty books on topics from hayfields to free speech to food. Her publications have received recognitions including Bank Street Children’s Best Books, Junior Library Guild Gold Standard, ALA Rainbow Booklist, Nautilus Book Awards Gold, Green Earth Book Awards shortlist, and Independent Press Award for children’s nonfiction.

Christy is passionate about engaging kids in strengthening our democracy. A former lawyer, she has written extensively about U.S. history, civics, and government. Her picture book “The Supreme Court and Us” introduces young readers to the Supreme Court and how it has shaped our lives. “Free for You and Me” uses poems and stories to explain our First Amendment freedoms. Christy has also written several nonfiction civics series for readers from elementary through high school.

Besides writing, Christy often visits schools to share ideas about writing, creativity, and civic engagement with students. She lives in rural Vermont, where she enjoys walking in the woods and playing cello (though not simultaneously).

### About Freedom to Speak, Courage to Listen

I am developing a program for schools, focused on fundamental democratic principles as an antidote to intolerance. The First Amendment provides us with freedom of expression, and also gives those with opposing views the right to express themselves as well. The underlying value here is that listening to competing viewpoints allows people in a democracy to engage in meaningful dialogue and find a way forward together. I seek to engage students through poetry and other media on themes of self-expression and listening, and to explore our roles and responsibilities as members of a democratic community, getting past the isolation of our silos.

### Find Me

Website: [www.christymihaly.com](http://www.christymihaly.com); IG: @christymihaly; Twitter: @CMwriter4kids; Facebook: [www.facebook.com/christymihaly](http://www.facebook.com/christymihaly)

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## Nadine Nelson

Hamden, CT

she/her

Nadine Nelson, a visionary artist and social entrepreneur, heads Global Local Gourmet, which creates immersive culinary experiences blending local ingredients with global flavors. Her art interventions, such as Public Kitchen and Stir the Pot, focus on community-building, sustainability, and unity. Nadine's work has been exhibited in Boston, New Haven, and New York, and she has presented on culturally relevant cuisine and using food as art and activism at Yale University, among other institutions.

With a teaching certificate from Tufts University and culinary training from the Ritz Escoffier in Paris, Nadine is passionate about underrepresented ethnic flavors in culinary education and the arts. Her writing has appeared in Plate Magazine, Zester Daily, and other publications. As an aspiring homesteader, she is seeking land to establish an eco-conscious culinary art center inspired by J. Morgan Puett's Mildred Lane.

### About Greater New Haven

Master Cooks Corps is a vibrant community of practice dedicated to empowering individuals and communities to embrace their food and health journey through education and practical skills. They firmly believe in the transformative power of food literacy, recognizing its pivotal role in achieving food sovereignty and independence, especially in historically marginalized communities affected by food insecurity.

With passion and dedication, Master Cooks Corps members work tirelessly to ensure access to nourishing and wholesome food for all. Their holistic approach goes beyond providing nutritious meals – they actively challenge and dismantle systemic structures that perpetuate food inequality. Through their engaging food education programs, individuals are equipped with the knowledge and skills to cultivate, prepare, and preserve their own food using traditional and sustainable methods.

By fostering a sense of empowerment and resilience, Master Cooks Corps is shaping a future where communities thrive on self-sufficiency and equitable access to healthy food. Through their commitment, they are paving the way for a more just and sustainable food system, one delicious meal at a time.

### Find Me

[www.nadinenelso2.wixsite.com/mysite-2](http://www.nadinenelso2.wixsite.com/mysite-2); [www.globallocalgourmet.com](http://www.globallocalgourmet.com); [www.mastercookscorps.org](http://www.mastercookscorps.org); [www.stirtheonline.com](http://www.stirtheonline.com); @globallocalgourmet





## Randall Nielsen

Manchester, NH

he/him

Randall Nielsen is an engineer, artist, and community organizer based in Manchester, NH. With a background in Mechanical Engineering, Randall brings a unique blend of technical expertise and creative vision to his endeavors. As a multimedia artist, Randall creates captivating works that celebrate color and light, often utilizing unconventional materials like iridescent cellophane. His artist mission is to “spread color and light throughout the universe through queer shiny art.”

Beyond his artistic pursuits, Randall is deeply committed to fostering inclusive environments and providing opportunities for marginalized communities. As the founder of Queerlective, he aims to create and promote spaces where Queer, BIPOC, and other underserved artists can thrive. Through art shows,

markets, and other community events, Randall connects artists with resources and facilitates personal and community growth. Additionally, as an Arts Commissioner for the city of Manchester, Randall provides valuable guidance to enhance representation and increase diversity in art programs within the community.

With his dynamic skill set and unwavering passion for the arts, Randall Nielsen continues to leave a lasting impact on the creative landscape, championing inclusivity and driving positive change.

### About Queerlective Inc

Queerlective’s mission is to “create and promote inclusive environments for Queer, BIPOC and other underserved communities while utilizing art for personal and community growth.” Through a range of art based gathering, Queerlective provides a space for Queer and BIPOC artists to showcase their work, connect with resources, and foster personal and community growth. By emphasizing the power of art as a catalyst for positive change, Queerlective strives to amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized artists, while fostering a sense of belonging, representation, and empowerment within the creative community.

### Find Me

strangepieces.com, RandallNielsen.com, Queerlective.com. @Fromstrangepieces on insta and tiktok. @Queer\_lective on insta and tiktok.



## Dani Robbins

Bar Harbor, ME

they/them

Dani Robbins (they/them) is a choreographer living and working on Wabanaki land in what is currently known as Maine, USA. Dani uses a multimedia creative practice to develop dance work. They grew up dancing and acting in the Boston area and later completed their undergraduate studies in dance at Bennington College. Dani has been hosted as an artist in residence at Lake Studios (Berlin, Germany, 2017 and 2018), by Elena Demyanenko at Bennington and Middlebury Colleges (2019 and 2020) and by Acadia National Park (2019). They have performed collaborative and solo works in Berlin, Bennington, Boston, New York City, and Portland. Dani currently teaches as adjunct faculty at College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine where they offer classes in contemporary dance anti-technique and composition. This year they will be

touring with their most recent performance work, “PLAYFIGHT,” in the US and abroad. As they pursue a certificate in Interdisciplinary Disability Studies from the University of Maine, their performance research is turning toward the complex body politics of professional wrestling, as well as the cultivation of accessible dance community in Maine. Additionally, they are a 3-5th grade classroom teacher and tend to many gardens.

### About Maine MiniFest

Maine MiniFest will be a biannual gathering of Maine dance artists that strives to enrich Maine’s dance community, foster collaboration and connection, and work against scarcity-based cultures in art communities. This weekend-long event brings together Maine’s diverse dance making community—from college students to established artists—to connect over workshops, panels, and nourishing meals, dreaming into the future of what dance can be in our state.

### Find Me

[www.dani-robbins.com](http://www.dani-robbins.com)



## Merrilee Schoen

Bangor, ME

she/her

Merrilee Schoen is a multimedia artist with a socially engaged art practice residing in the Maine Central Highlands. She studied Psychology at SUNY New Paltz and is currently pursuing her MFA in Intermedia at the University of Maine in Orono. As an artist, Merrilee works to offer a frame of preciousness to perceivably unprecious, discarded materials, and a frame of functional beauty with communities on the societal fringe. Her goal is to make visible- through explicit and abstract means- concepts of social inequalities, resource distribution and dualistic emotional landscapes. She explores the spaces between precarity and resilience through sculpture, public works, material investigation and symbology. Merrilee uses rust, glass, metal, wood, thread and paper, and cast off objects to assemble these visual and conceptual syntheses.

Merrilee is the founder and creative director of The Joy Truck Project, a traveling community resource center distributing free resources and community-led workshops in Piscataquis County. Re-use and barter are a few of her favorite things. And her orange traveling road-cat named Marbles.

### About Joy Truck

The Joy Truck is a mobile community resource center bringing resources and the arts alongside opportunities for leadership and co-creation within rural and low-income neighborhoods of Piscataquis County. Free resources include books, clothes, art supplies and making tools, Narcan and literature on local social services. Community stipends offer opportunities for individuals to teach their neighbors or inspire a gathering, and be compensated for it. Social change can be joyous.

### Find Me

Instagram: [merrilee\\_emmanuella](#); [www.merrileemmanuella.com](http://www.merrileemmanuella.com)



## Ellen Smith Ahern

Lebanon, NH

she/her

Ellen Smith Ahern (she/her) is a dance artist and social worker/community organizer living with her family on Abenaki lands in N'Dakinna/New Hampshire. Her dances explore the intersection of movement, storytelling and nature, and with respect to all the folks that make her work possible, she creates performance projects that include a wider array of people than might otherwise feel welcomed into traditional dance spaces. Ellen has performed and taught throughout Mexico, Cuba, Qatar, Europe and the US, collaborating with many artists, including Jane Comfort & Company, Lida Winfield, Kate Elias, Rebecca Pappas, Hannah Dennison, Pauline Jennings, Polly Motley, El Circo Contemporaneo, Amy Chavasse, David Appel and Tiffany Rhynard's Big APE. With generous support from many institutions and community members, she shares her work

through film, installation and live performance in a diverse array of venues, including the National Gallery of Art, Dance on Camera Festival/Film at Lincoln Center, Middlefield Community Center, Bates Dance Festival, AVA Gallery, Dixon Place, Artistree Community Arts Center, Flynn Theater, Ionion Center of Kefalonia and Rococo Theatre in Prague.

### About Vulture Sister Song

Vulture Sister Song is an interdisciplinary performance project gathering artists and community members to celebrate the possibilities of vibrant interdependence. Together, artists Ellen Smith Ahern, Kate Elias, Pete Dybdahl, Jacob Elias and Josina Guess cultivate performances, an accompanying guidebook of illustrations, stories, and environmental education, engaging workshops, and community partnerships to deepen our exploration and draw on local wisdom. Described as “an amazing convergence of presence and sensory webmaking”, Vulture Sister Song features a herd of shapeshifting lanterns that migrate alongside dancing human bodies, while a soundscape of folk music, rock lullabies and storytelling about vultures lights up dimensions of humor, wonder and cruelty inherent in our relationships across species. Vultures serve as a powerful vehicle for these themes: their role in the ecosystem resonates both environmentally and culturally for communities grappling with toxic histories of exploitation and collectively envisioning a future in which humans move with others in right(er) relationship.

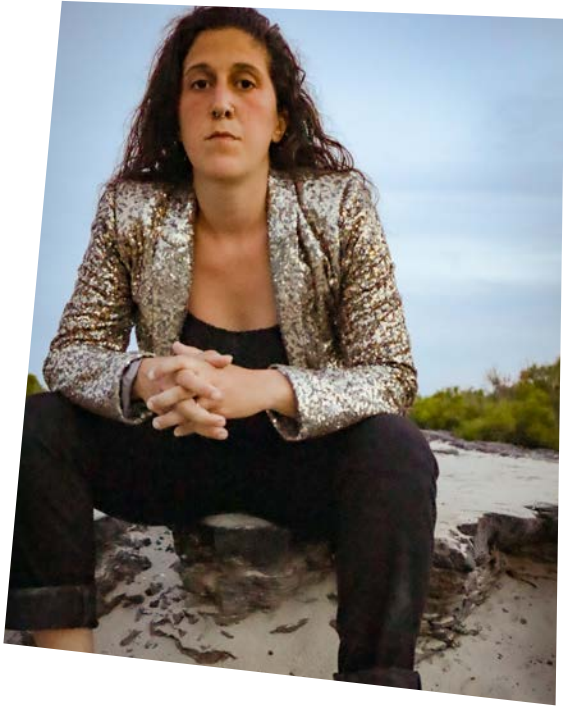
### Find Me

<https://ellensmithahern.com>; @emsahern; <https://vulturesistersong.wordpress.com>



# Meet the Fellows

Back to Cohort



## Jess Sweeney

North Adams, MA

she/her

Jessica Sweeney (she, her), is an entrepreneur, consultant, and community organizer. Jess received her Bachelors in Fine and Performing Arts from MCLA, with a minor in Arts Management, and was recently elected to North Adams City Council.

Jessica has founded 3 North Adams based businesses: ROOTS Teen Center, a nonprofit where she served as the Founding Director for its first 4 years, is a safe space for people ages 14-22 to be heard, encouraged, and empowered. Common Folk, an artist collective comprised of local and emerging creators of all mediums who share resources to grow and thrive in their creative work. Most recently, Jessica has launched Savvy Hive, a secondhand clothing store and consulting practice that empowers creative entrepreneurs and community organizers to

develop sustainable work practices and healthy work environments that are centered on shared leadership and collaboration. In her spare time, Jessica helps with local initiatives and projects.

Jessica was recognized in 2016 by Berkshire Magazine as one of the Berkshire 25. In 2017, she received the Berkshire 40 Under 40 award, and most recently received the Under 40 Changemaker award from 1Berkshire's Trendsetter Awards.

### **About Common Folk Artist Collective**

Common Folk Artist Collective is a group of local and emerging creators who share and utilize resources to explore and thrive in our creative endeavors.

Common Folk members collectively invest in a shared studio, retail, and performance space that is available to all members at affordable costs. Leadership Members organize opportunities for members to share their creative work with the community and actively advocate for and promote member's work to the greater public.

### **Find Me**

[www.commonfolk.org](http://www.commonfolk.org) \ @wearecommonfolk



## Dan Wenger

Camden, ME

he/him

Dan is a multi-instrumentalist, creative arts psychotherapist, and educator who recently re-located from his hometown of New York City to rural Midcoast Maine. He is passionate about using shared music experiences to support the expression of socially isolated individuals of any age or background. His professional experience ranges from working with: infants in pediatric palliative care; neurodiverse children, teens, and young adults in special education and psychiatric contexts; and, in hospice care settings with adults and their families.

### **About Music Therapy for Disadvantaged Clients with Disabilities**

Dan is using the Creative Community Fellows Program to bring music therapy sessions to individuals in rural Maine

who are experiencing geographical and financial barriers to mental health services. These individuals may be nonverbal and find greater success in expressing through musical experiences. In an attempt to create a sustainable program, video documentation of sessions and guardian testimony will be captured, edited, and presented for educational and fundraising purposes.

### **Find Me**

[www.midcoastmusicacademy.com/music-therapy](http://www.midcoastmusicacademy.com/music-therapy); [www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/dan-wenger-new-york-ny/921858](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/dan-wenger-new-york-ny/921858)

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