

## 2023 Independent Practitioner Fellowship Projects

*Note: These are the original project descriptions. Fellows' project concept might have changed over the course of the Fellowship.*

**Enrique "Quique" Aviles:** *Why Art? Conversations about Art and the Humanities with Former Students*

With this Fellowship, Quique will explore how opportunities to be involved with the arts and humanities have affected the lives and life trajectories of the young people he has engaged during 40+ years of community projects focused on telling our stories. By engaging in conversations with former students and mentees, Quique first aims to understand what difference these projects made for his students at that stage of their life as well as how the arts and humanities – poetry, music, painting, literature – have continued to be present in their lives. At the end of the Fellowship, Quique will choose 10 former students to participate in oral history interviews that document why this work matters and the difference this work has made on the arts and humanities landscape of this city. Quique hopes that this project will reinforce for them that our stories and the stories of our families and communities are important, that they have meaning and value, and that we have a responsibility to document and share them to inspire others.

**Shae Corey:** *Everyone's Invited: The Potter's House History Project*

Established in 1960 as a café and community space through the Church of the Saviour, The Potter's House has maintained a strong neighborhood presence in DC's Adams Morgan for nearly 70 years. From supporting those suffering through HIV/AIDS, to providing housing, food and job training, The Potter's House and its sister organizations (also founded by the Church of the Saviour) played an essential role in Adams Morgan during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the ever-changing urban landscape of DC in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, The Potter's House maintained an open-door policy that encouraged honest and respectful conversation between people of varying backgrounds and different opinions. This oral history project will document the stories of Potter's House employees and volunteers while analyzing the impact of coffee-house community activism in the city.

**Mēlani Douglass:** *Where Two Or More Are Gathered: Mining the Medicine of Connection In Anacostia and Barry Farms Communities*

Curator and conceptual artist Mēlani N Douglass unearths the wisdom of everyday and ancestral technology present in the Anacostia and Barry Farms communities. Highlighting the healing properties of gathering, Mēlani collects past and present-day stories that uplift traditions and soul medicine, such as Sunday dinners, cookouts, block parties, sitting with a friend, or at the feet of an elder. She explores the benefits and continuation of connecting

traditions in these communities from the 1800s to the present as well as their roots in antiquity.

**Tasha Klusmann:** *Washington D.C. Roller Skating*

The project will consist of in-depth research to include first person accounts that expand, verify and document our knowledge of roller skating history in Washington, D.C. The effort will include the collection of memorabilia from current and former DC residents to corroborate research findings. With much misinformation being consumed, this project's aim is to compile accurate information and to celebrate this unique aspect of history.

**Allison Press and Xena Ni:** *DC Museum of Sidewalk Stuff*

The [DC Museum of Sidewalk Stuff](#) is a pop-up museum that shares the hidden stories behind everyday objects people leave for free on the sidewalk. Whether it's a dead plant that symbolizes the falling out of a friendship or burned-down candles that hold memories of someone's first love, the museum aims to strengthen our relationships with our neighbors by inspiring curiosity about the things they give away.

We live in a city surrounded by "capital H" History: museums catalog sweeping events in our nation's history, monuments commemorate national figures and global wars. This museum encourages visitors to see themselves as a part of the "little h" history happening around us every day.

Our goal for the fellowship is to focus the museum's exhibits on the community organizing practice that inspired it: mutual aid. We want to leverage the museum to document and catalog mutual aid movements, using simple objects as vehicles for telling stories about how the practice of sharing resources has cultivated stronger relationships in our communities.

**Kim Roberts:** *Researching the History of LGBTQ+ Poets from Washington, DC*

Kim Roberts plans to use the fellowship to compile and edit an anthology of LGBTQ+ poets from Washington, DC. The anthology would span the history of the city, from its founding in 1800 through the present. For earlier poets, inclusion is sometimes tricky, as we did not yet have the language to describe the range of queer identities. But Roberts believes it's crucial to show that LGBTQ+ writers were living and working in the nation's capital from the start, influencing the city and the nation with their crucial cultural contributions. Any literary history of DC, as the capital of the country, is both a local story and serves as a microcosm of a larger, national story.

**Nancy Shia:** *History of the corner of 18<sup>th</sup> and Columbia, better known as the Adams Morgan Plaza*

From the Knickerbocker Theatre disaster in January 1922 to today, the corner of Columbia Road and 18<sup>th</sup> Street has been a sacred community space in the Adams Morgan neighborhood. For 8 years, the property has been in litigation in a fight between the community and the property owner Truist Bank, over our right to the continued use of the

easement in the plaza, a property right we fought for and secured in 1976. The project is to create a photographic history of the plaza, with an emphasis on 1976 to today, but will also include historical images prior to 1976. We will have a community forum at the Mount Pleasant Library, which will include an exhibition of photos showing the history of the Plaza. The goal is to formally document this history as well as to educate members of the community about the upcoming trial that will determine whether the plaza remains available as an easement, a popular short cut going from Columbia Road to 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Jessica Valoris:** *How We Be Free: A Study Kit*

How We Be Free is a micro study-kit that honors the ways that enslaved ancestors imagined and practiced liberation.

Self-liberating Black ancestors created a blueprint for liberatory practice by organizing networks of solidarity, mutual assistance, and collective resistance. They built movements for abolition and reparations, advocated for land, and built self-sustaining Black towns. How We Be Free invites Black organizers and descendants of this radical tradition to reclaim local histories of care, justice, and resistance; and to create counter-narratives that center Black joy and interdependence.

The study kit includes a customized set of playing cards, dice, booklet, and a DC-specific zine that focuses on local histories of Black fugitive practice.

How We Be Free can be used casually at the family cookout or can be engaged intentionally to support community activations. It can be a tool for movement organizers doing work around abolition, reparations, mutual aid, and land-stewardship; and it can be a resource for facilitating rituals of remembrance.

Jessica Valoris will develop a prototype for the study kit and zine and will facilitate a small-group study session with local organizers to create video-based rituals of remembrance, honoring histories of Black resistance in Washington, DC.