



Thanks to the generous support of Joy of Giving Something Foundation (JGS), Imagining America (IA) has awarded 49 students with college scholarships since the program was established by Howard Stein in 2011. The goal of the Fellows Program is to elevate photography and digital media as a pathway for students to pursue their careers and make a difference in their communities.

2015 JGS FELLOWS



Rachel Chappell, Bates College

Undergraduate Student, Sociology/ African American Culture

Growing up as a Black girl in Baltimore City, I didn't hear many people talk about art. Art wasn't one of those things that "Black people do". It was for rich people. It was for people who actually had stories to tell. Graciously, in Middle School, one of my art teachers recommended that I take a class on analog photography. She told me that I had a voice worth sharing, and if I wasn't comfortable with writing or public speaking, I would just have to find another way. As soon as I started photography, I was hooked. It was empowering to take pictures of my friends and my neighborhood and explain to others the stories we all had. Our ups, our downs, our triumphs and our missteps were all captured in my camera. Photography taught me that my narrative and the narratives of those around me were worth listening to. It was a way to dismantle the monolithicity of the human experience. I feel like it is a disservice to the community at large to not share such valuable tools and resources, such as photography.

As I got older-with the help of many teachers along the way-I transitioned to digital photography, for the ease of production as well as the ever-growing accessibility of digital cameras. During my time at Bates College, I've developed a new afterschool class for a local middle school that served mostly minority students and taught the basics of digital photography. Since we didn't have the funds to buy the whole class fancy Canon Rebel T5is, I conducted the course using their newly school-issued iPads and the free Adobe Photoshop application on the Apple Store. The students didn't realize that they had an entrance into the world of art and storytelling right in the palm of their hands. After the class, the students displayed their work at an art show at the local library. Since then, I've been doing photography and videography work for various local nonprofits that serve children. After I graduate, I plan to start a nonprofit to raise money to fund art-focused programming for underserved students in Baltimore City. I want to show the students the same thing that my former art teacher showed me: We all deserve to access art.





Miela Fetaw, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Undergraduate Student, Global Studies/Journalism

It is a typical night in the Fetaw household, and Baba is recanting one of his sad childhood stories. “We used to walk for miles with the herd. I was a little boy, maybe five, and every morning I led the cattle. That was my school.” We’ve heard his stories countless times. My sisters and I would get tired of his memories; of him trying to guilt trip us over nights refusing to do dishes or Saturday mornings spent sleeping in. It is hard to trust Baba with my grief without him comparing my first-world struggles to his. We were not necessarily tired of his stories; we were tired of the guilt. My parents were born into a condition where dreaming was impossible. Born and raised in one of the poorest countries in the world, Eritrea, education was practically unattainable. My grandparents did not continue past the first grade. My parents, however, did not allow their conditions to determine their faith. Eventually they’d leave their respective villages for better lives. Fast forward decades later and my parents are college-educated career people.

My passion for stories of people and places stem from this guilt - of not understanding why I was given this easy living, while relatives still tend to livestock. I constantly wonder what they would have made of my life.

The guilt over the life I live and opportunities I’ve been granted fuel my passion to be a global citizen. I want to dedicate my life to ensure the living of others through art, through stories. I want to tell the stories for people whom cannot tell their own for themselves. I want to share stories not for politics or profit, but for people. Empathy is a dying art. I want to create empathy, emotion between strangers.

I work as a teaching artist primarily with students of color to use theatre, spoken word and speech to talk about lives, experiences and stories – particularly ones my students can relate to. We have learned to reclaim, re-empower and re-imagine our narratives and channel them into productive discussions on the racial issues America is facing. The art they create allows them to embrace the discomfort in talking about these issues and to channel their frustrations and concerns in their characters. Just last month, many of my students took first place in the state of Wisconsin in several categories, categories predominately white. Pieces ranged from the death of Emmitt Till, the cyclical system of higher education for black students, and the history of voodoo.



Robert Huerta, University of California, Santa Barbara

Doctoral Student, Art

Robert Huerta is a community organizer and artist who lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. Before attending the University of California, Santa Barbara under a doctoral fellowship, Robert transferred to CSU Dominguez Hills,

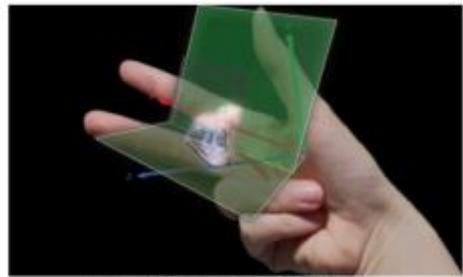
after receiving high honors and two A.A's from Santa Monica College--one in Art and the other in Liberal Arts. At CSU Dominguez Hills, Robert has been employed by the Department of Outreach and School Relations, the Art and Design Department, and the College of Arts and Humanities. He has acted as the founder and director of the Dominguez Hills Arts Collective (DHAC), an Interdisciplinary arts organization dedicated to the accessibility and engagement of the arts. He recently graduated with high honors, a B.A. in Art, and a minor in Art History from California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). He received a Student Research Fellowship for the Graduate Studies and Research Department's Office of Undergraduate Research Scholarship and Creative Activity. He has authored and presented his research on Decontextualization and Exclusion in Postmodern Institutional Display, as well as on the Efficacy of Social Practice in Community Regeneration His current research interests include: social practice, community building/regeneration, and arts education outreach. As the Graphic Designer for the College of Art and Humanities Robert partnered with the English Graduate Association to design the layout for a 113-page multi-literacy publication released in May of 2016.



Performance: GoPro, Choreography, Projection
Series: A Distributed Network



Software: Processing, Illustrator
Series: A Distributed Network



Software: After Effects, 123D Catch, Blender
Series: A Distributed Network



Christopher Kojzar, University of Maryland Baltimore County

Master's Student, Intermedia and Digital Arts

Digital media is more essential now than ever, and it is a tool I use in my fine arts practice as well as a method to engage with community members. My artistic goals and research align with the values of the Imagining America ethos, especially in light of my involvement with the Baltimore Imagining Group, a loose coalition of arts and humanities scholars, denizens and community activists that formed after the 2015 IA Conference. My work samples reflect my methods of building relations with members of the community and my intention is to reveal how people find their 'self' in a place or space within the environs of Baltimore City.

My research reflects a motivation to convey stories that are pushed aside. For the past three years, I have built relations with with people who are affected by the stories we hear and ultimately become a part of in Baltimore. Some of my work deals with a level of discomfort towards a system that is constantly in need of mending. My video installation "Human Trafficking" is a piece on women who are incarcerated for committing drug crimes. It is a personal reflection on my cousin, who is serving a sentence at Alderson Federal Penitentiary, and I created the piece as a way to cope with the inaccessibility of someone close.

The biggest obstacle I face is discovering how to produce media that will recognize a need for some type of change. When I shot "Liberty Rec and Tech interview with Kim Trueheart", my goal was to promote Kim, who ran a very successful campaign for City Council President. Even though she did not win, many still recognize and value her commitment to establish safe spaces in Baltimore. In another light, "Unemployed Politicians" is a room sized

installation that I created in response to the writing of Angela Davis, whereby she is quoted to say that “this country needs more unemployed politicians.” The piece is an interpretation of censorship, the power of citizenry, and the ‘conditions’ of the American dream.

When I started my graduate program I quickly realized how my research paralleled the efforts of peers and professionals at UMBC. The 2015 Imagining America Conference at UMBC drew me in immediately and together with Lee Boot, the director of the Imaging Research Center at UMBC, I began to film and interact with several community organizers of the Baltimore Imagining Group. Through my involvement, I hope to promote the core values of Imagining America, yet understand that a major obstacle is continually revealing the players that are on the fringes of mainstream awareness. As my graduate studies at UMBC in Intermedia and Digital Arts go into the second year, my goal is to take what I learn as a researcher and apply it to my fine arts studio practice.



Anya Ku, University of California, Berkeley

Undergraduate Student, Political Science

Community engagement and photography have always been inextricable from each other and omnipresent in my life. As the first child of immigrant parents from different ends of the globe (Soviet Union and Peru), communication has always been an interesting phenomenon in my household. Switching from Spanish to Russian to English and back again made me realize how much meaning is lost in spoken language. I found my solution in photography. Through creating and presenting visual images I could communicate my message so that it could be understood universally. In my city, Oakland, where over 140 different languages are spoken, photography has provided an essential medium with which to engage my community. Growing up in Oakland public schools, I was exposed to a rich variety of arts, and I am now committed to giving back to the community which gave me so much in the way I know best: through taking photos and sharing skills.

A pivotal moment for me in my community engagement through photography was the first time I was recognized on the street for my work. Having someone that I did not know, recognize who I was because of the work that I have done within my community made me feel like I was making a difference, even if only to one person. This moment legitimized my efforts and motivated me to continue working hard to give back to my city.

The most recent community-engagement project that I have embarked on has been the creation of a narrative cookbook called *Flavors of Oakland*. This cookbook is a collection of twenty recipes, sets of photographs, and life stories of Oakland home cooks. The mission behind this book was to encourage cross-cultural conversations with the goal of breaking down racial barriers that exist among Oakland’s youth. By creating this documentation of Oakland’s diversity, I attempt to show people what their neighbors are cooking and how much they have in common, because it is much easier to hate someone if you do not really know them. One of the most significant roadblocks I faced while carrying out this project has been reaching the greatest number of people. To conqueror

this obstacle, I hosted a crowd funding campaign, which was able to raise over \$15,000 through small donations to be able to afford donating over 300 free copies of the book to all of Oakland's public schools, libraries, and youth organizations. By donating the book to these institutions I am trying to reach as many youth as possible, especially those who would not otherwise be able to spend their income on a cookbook. Even though the book is not due to be released until June, it has already received outstanding media attention including articles in the Oakland Tribune and other local newspapers and a TV spot on KTVU Channel 2 News.



Zora J. Murff, University of Nebraska, Rural Futures Institute

Master's Student, Studio Art

After receiving my Bachelors of Science in Psychology, I spent a few years providing human services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illnesses, and youths in the juvenile criminal justice system. I found fulfillment during my time working in the field, but there always seemed to be something missing. When I started studying photography and saw works by documentary photographers, I realized the potential of using images to help define the robust and complicated identities of communities for those who are unfamiliar, and how these photographs could be used in concert with activism to generate change.

As I began making images of the kids I worked with in the justice system of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, I noticed how much more aware I became of the stereotypes that get applied to them; the things people assume about these individuals. The justice system uses photographs, specifically the mugshot, to construct a false dichotomy between good and bad, criminal and citizen. We are given images and details, are left to consume, digest, and make our own assumptions based upon the information given. The photographs that I made explore this trope and serve as an interruption to it, questioning our consumption of and collective belief in images. Through obscurity, the individuals that I photographed no longer have a face, they way in which we identify. This anonymity rebuffs our desire to solely identify, replacing it with the ability to identify with those photographed. Reaching these conclusions would not have been possible for me unless I was a part of those communities. My race and personal experiences during my upbringing allowed me that initial access, giving those that I worked with a way to vet and then ultimately connect with me. However, I was still working with them from a place of privilege, my access to education and art serving as a dividing line between us. I decided to live in the community where a majority of the kids in the system live to bridge this gap. By living where they lived and experiencing their way of life, I was more able to see them and make photographs that allowed others to as well.

In continuing my artistic practice, I still find myself working with the the photograph as a form of representation in the criminal justice system, but my interest has transitioned into the idea of the picture being used as both a source of and challenge to stereotypes of people of color, the image essentially as image. Although my focused has broadened, I again find myself in the position of finding ways to connect with my local community to not only make, but also disseminate work. Currently, I am working on partnerships with organizations with strong ties to historically African-American neighborhoods, public community spaces, and prison re-entry programs to be able to provide a multifaceted approach to the work that I want to make.



Chanet Wallace, Maryland Institute College of Art

Master's Student, Community Arts

Baltimore will always be home for me. My camera allows me to dream outside the harsh reality my peers and I face. I am not a product of my environment, instead a walking testimony that little black girls with dreams become women with visions. Just like many Baltimoreans I experience the depths of blackness, meaning being born into poverty, economical disparities, racism, underrepresentation, misrepresentation, inequality, and generations of pain and life lemons.

As an artist in Baltimore, I realize there is something wrong with the way African Americans, especially in Baltimore, are portrayed. Just a year ago and counting the world has magnified Baltimore and the representation of the African American communities didn't reflect the truth. Society's ideologies and underrepresentation of African Americans motivate me to create photographs that project the many identities that aren't always reflected in media. Slavery structured American society and race is the institution that influences it. With my photographs I hope to spark a change in this repeated narrative. I use my camera to arm myself against unfaithful imagery. I aim to educate those who don't have access to this medium, to inspire the youth to tell their stories, and to create spaces where people can exchange ideas and thoughts on racism and oppression. I aim to control the narratives that are forgotten and misrepresented. I use my camera to mentor the youth; it has been a successful experience involving the youth and adults. I use my camera to represent the black race in a major way, to challenge stigma and negative stereotypes, encourage people to be allies, to create and reshape the narratives of the African American race, and to highlight the progression from the painful stories that still echo among us. With my camera I am able to document black humanity that is often ignored and misunderstood by society, but in a world full of superficial images, whom can you blame?

The unrest in Baltimore played a pivotal role in my photography. Before and after the unrest, I was upset about

what was happening in my city. I was even more upset with the way the media portrayed Baltimore. Mainstream media controlled the narrative of Baltimore while shutting off other people's voices. I believe I can be a voice that works against poor misrepresentation while engaging communities. In April of last year I was inspired to create photographs that depict real identities, real stories, and real dialogue.

I realize there aren't many black photographers and sometimes that can be very discouraging, however, it motivates me to work harder. Photography and photojournalism is somewhat known as a field for middle age white men, which is evident when observing the workplace. You don't see many women pursuing community art or even in the many spaces of photographers. But despite many adversities I may face, I continue to work. There is a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done. I believe in doing the work efficiently even when your effort goes unnoticed.



Adreenah April Wynn, University of Florida

Undergraduate Student, Art & Technology and Graphic Design

I need to be able to use design to help the world, both the people and environment. A large part of my desire to help others with design is from my own experience. I have a blood disorder called Sickle Cell Disease, I have had this disease all of my life. Sickle cell disease comes with many complications and one of the complications that occur are intense pain episodes called Sickle Cell Crisis.

Sickle Cell Disease led me to design. It started around middle school when I was having issues with the disease. In the hospital, I would draw simple sketches and this became boring. The only other thing I had access to was a computer with Microsoft Paint. I used design as escapism. I was being silly and creating for fun. Eventually, I was able to get a Photoshop trial. The nurse helped me print my designs and post them on the wall. I feel like the process of design saved me from depression and the outcome of the work also helped brighten other people's day.

When deciding a career choice I knew I wanted to do the two things I love, making designs and helping others. I currently pursue a degree in both Graphic Design and Art+Technology; I'm also working towards my Arts in Healthcare certificate and minor in Sociology. I'm working to use the power of social design to make a positive impact in the community. I've done this through creating infographic posters to elicit concern about Sickle Cell Disease from the audience. In some of my diversity work, I challenge the audience to become aware of the power of language and to reflect upon how our automatic responses when engaging with people different than ourselves. After the shooting in Ferguson, MO I did a performance of projected protest signs from the last fifty years comparing and contrasting past history with the current event. Both pieces were powerful AND accessible stimulating constructive dialog amongst my peers. These are just a few examples of how I use design to help us go beyond below surface level conversations.

Merging the factors that I'm a graphic designer, female, African American, and have a disability truly adds an extra challenge in itself, but I won't quit. I know that I represent a voice for many people. I ultimately want to become a Graphic Designer and an Art Therapist, with a focus in social design. I'm currently able to further develop my skills as the Co-Facilitator of a Therapeutic Photography Program in my hometown, I love working with disabled children in schools and hospitals. I want to follow my dreams and show that no matter what the circumstance or struggle, you can overcome. I believe that the diversity within myself helps to provide a different dynamic to every group I participate in and I work hard to be a voice to those who are not heard. I do what I love to help and empower others.

