

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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USC Faculty and Students Awarded Arts in Action Grants to Promote Social Change

Art as a Tool for Social Change: February – December 2024
Funded Projects Address Issues from Health Care to Climate Change

Los Angeles, CA, February 28, 2024 —[USC Arts in Action](#) is excited to announce ten projects selected for funding in 2024. The projects were chosen based on their creative solutions, projected impact, and partnerships with grassroots organizations in Los Angeles, and use the power of the arts to address issues including health and wellness, climate change, immigration and voter engagement, gentrification and displacement, critical needs for the unhoused, and more.

Taking on intersectional issues with integrity and accountability, these ten Arts in Action–funded projects will disrupt norms, create solutions, and build healthier and empowered communities that embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion and promote well-being. Leveraging the expertise of USC faculty and fostering relationships with visionary Los Angeles organizations, collectives, and activists, the collaborative model also offers students opportunities to learn from and engage with neighboring communities, create connections, propose solutions, and inspire the next generation of change-makers.

“This year’s projects focus on health, urban planning, and civic engagement and are designed to get people talking and connecting in meaningful ways,” says Lucy Zepeda, Lead Producer of Arts in Action. “Our students and faculty are incredibly dedicated and passionate. Their energy is contagious and moves us to learn and work alongside the community to create change.”

Project updates will be available on the Arts in Action [website](#), [Instagram](#), and in the quarterly newsletter. The projects will commence in mid-February with varied timelines, as the work is process-oriented, and some will culminate in a presentation.

The ten projects selected for 2024 funding are:

Artful Maps for Action is a joint initiative between the [Los Angeles Community Action Network \(LA CAN\)](#), a community organization in Skid Row, and faculty and students from USC. Its objective is to create geo-data collection methods at the grassroots level and find ways to analyze and map the data. Experts including [François Bar](#) (USC Annenberg), [Juan De Lara](#) (USC Dornsife), [Annette Kim](#) (USC Price), and [Andrzej Rutkowski](#) (USC Libraries), will provide opportunities for participation by students enrolled in related coursework and those interested in art and advocacy work. LA CAN’s executive director Pete White and food and wellness organizer Todd Cunningham will play a crucial role in co-creating artful maps of Skid Row to increase the visibility of community resources, articulate community demands, and support community action for its most vulnerable members.

Building Bunker Hill’s Rebel Archive is a collaborative project that will honor the neighborhood’s history, identity, and traditions. It also seeks to raise awareness about the traumatic legacy of urban renewal and displacement in Los Angeles. To achieve this, [Dr. Meredith Drake Reitan](#), a faculty member of the [USC School of Architecture](#) specializing in planning history, along with [Andrzej Rutkowski](#), [Curtis Fletcher](#), and [Suzanne Noruschat](#) from [USC Libraries](#), will work with former residents of Bunker Hill, high

school students, and USC students to create a community memory project. Conducted in partnership with [Los Angeles Public Library's Octavia Lab](#), the collaboration will dive into the neighborhood's past and inform future planning practices.

Building Community Around a Shared Cancer Journey: A Narrative Medicine Approach will present a series of online and in-person narrative medicine writing workshops for patients and families served by [Cancer Support Community Los Angeles \(CSCLA\)](#) as well as USC undergraduate and graduate students. The project is focused on fostering the physical and mental health, long-term resilience, and survivorship of those affected by cancer. CSCLA's associate director of programs [Kathy Riley](#) will lead the project, and students from [USC's Master of Science in Narrative Medicine Program](#) will participate under the guidance of [Dr. Erika Wright](#) and [Dr. Kairos Llobera](#).

Calle a Calle is a collaborative project between USC Political Science students and professionals from the [USC Thornton School of Music](#) and [South LA Cafe](#). Led by Gabriella Marquez and Jazmin Mikhael, students from the [USC Department of Political Science and International Relations](#), under the academic advisement of Kiki Miller, the project will promote positive self-image, cultural pride, and civic engagement to empower young people in South Central. Focusing on Corridos Tumbados, a subgenre of Mexican regional music which has gained global popularity and holds significant meaning for many South L.A. youth, the project's primary objective is to help young people express their unique stories and viewpoints through songwriting and music lessons, particularly on contemporary and historical political and legal issues.

Dance and Ability merges dance, health, and education to benefit communities that are often overlooked or stigmatized; this includes people living with Parkinson's disease, Down syndrome, and neurodivergent individuals. The project is led by Kaufman professor [Patrick Corbin](#), with support from research assistant [Claire Rhee](#). In a new partnership with [The Miracle Project](#), this year's project will focus on people living with autism or who are neurodivergent. [Dr. Rebecca Cunningham](#) from [USC Chan Division](#), also a key project team member, praises the program's approach. "What I really value about this program is that it does have a multidisciplinary lens, and by having a multidisciplinary perspective, you're really able to support the individual holistically across all of their domains of needs, strengths, and desires for their life." As a result of the previous two years of work, [USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance](#) has established a dance and health area of study.

Emotion House is a student-designed project supported by the [USC Peace Garden](#). Undergraduates [Katya Urban](#), a Visual and Performing Art student from the [USC School of Dramatic Arts](#), and Aaron Abunu, a student in the [USC School of Architecture](#), will design a transformative space for the student community to serve as a haven in their often-overwhelming school days, where they can freely express their emotions of loss and grief. Participants can reset their senses and thoughts with playful moments involving movement, sound, and the visual arts, and walk away with information and resources to help navigate their emotional distress.

Fifty-One Miles is in its second year of organizing walks at one of the city's most varied and neglected landscapes as a response to the climate crisis and a call to action for Angelenos to build a deeper relationship with the Los Angeles River. Honoring environmental and social justice advocates, noting the impacts of climate change, and documenting the river's conditions through mapping, photography, film, and narrative ethnography, the project goes beyond fostering resilience as an opportunity to improve land access and ecological restoration. Launched by USC graduate students in the [Landscape Architecture + Urbanism program](#), and includes Nina Weithorn, Mark Reid, Zoe Detweiler, and Leslie

Dinkin, who are also completing a dual degree in the [Heritage Conservation program](#) and USC alumni Hannah Michael Flynn, an urban and ecological designer, and Camille Shooshani, a documentary filmmaker, in partnership with [NOVA Community Arts](#) and [Friends of the LA River \(FOLAR\)](#).

Monuments and the Future of Memory: Remembering Willowbrook is a project by [USC School of Architecture](#) faculty members [Aroussiak Gabrielian](#) and [Alison Hirsch](#), along with [Beth Petersons](#) from [LA Commons](#) and George Evans and Reginald Johnson from the [Willowbrook Inclusion Network \(WIN\)](#), that redefines the public narrative of Willowbrook and celebrates the lives of its historically Black community. “We got to learn firsthand from the people of Willowbrook,” says a USC student participant. “I think you tend to forget how collaborative the field is and how many voices are on the table when designing for a community.” Now in the final design phase for three monuments and a connecting “story corridor” along 120th Street, and building on previous efforts outlined in the “[Monuments and the Future of Memory](#),” USC student participants will continue to learn from the people of Willowbrook and work collaboratively with the community, engaging through story summits, youth workshops, and community events.

Projection Mapping for L.A. Chinatown is a collaboration between students of the [USC School of Cinematic Arts](#) including [Katie Luo](#), who is studying Media Arts + Practice; [Eilythia Penati](#), majoring in Film and TV Production; Sifei Zhang, studying journalism at the [USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism](#); and Sophat Phea, a founding member of the [Chinatown Community for Equitable Development \(CCED\)](#). Addressing tenant rights and gentrification, the team will organize workshops on projection mapping in Chinatown to promote creative collaboration, strengthen community bonds, and empower participants by using art as a tool for advocacy and storytelling.

Virtual Reality Memorial for Gynecologic Cancer Patients is spearheaded by [Dr. Mona Guo](#), MD, of [Keck School of Medicine of USC](#), and [Marientina Gotsis](#), professor at the [USC School of Cinematic Arts](#) and director of the USC [Creative Media and Behavioral Health Center](#). Keck School of Medicine Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Cinematic Arts students will join the team to co-design “Celebration of Life” workshops for end-of-life gynecologic cancer patients from the [LA General Medical Center Gynecologic Oncology Clinic](#) for emotional care and to create a VR legacy experience. The goal is to bring patients and loved ones together in a celebration of life and bridge the gap between healthcare providers and patients.

About Arts in Action

Launched in 2018 to support and create work that builds upon the University of Southern California’s commitment to addressing society’s most pressing issues. Now in its sixth year of funding arts projects by USC faculty and students in partnership with community organizations, Arts in Action has supported over 50 new and recurring projects that leverage the power of the arts to enhance the quality of life in Los Angeles and to serve the public good.

For more details, visit artsinaction.usc.edu or contact lucyzepe@usc.edu.