



American Friends Service Committee



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PAN VALLEY INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES ARTEVISM FELLOWS

Fresno, Calif. – The Pan Valley Institute (PVI) is pleased to announce the selection of the four fellows who will participate in their new ArteVism Fellowship Program. Designed for Latinx and Indigenous youth, the fellowship is a partnership with Fresno State’s College of Arts and Humanities and Department of Theatre and Dance. The fellows, ages 18 to 29, will leverage the arts to create provocative programming that advocates for the change they hope to see in the world.

“The ArteVism Fellowship Program seeks to empower and foster civic engagement and community building through artistic expression among Latinx and Indigenous youth in the Central Valley,” said PVI Program Director Myrna Martinez Nateras. “By recognizing, celebrating and activating Latinx and Indigenous youth through the arts, they can challenge the systems of fear and oppression that plague them.”

The four fellows will work together to produce original theatre pieces which will help deepen their engagement and civic participation in Central Valley communities. Through a series of residential gatherings and intensive trainings, fellows will be immersed in creative skill building, popular education and community theatre.

The candidates were nominated by partners of the Pan Valley Institute and the College of Arts and Humanities at CSU Fresno who share the core principles and goals of the program. The ArteVism fellows are:

- Ariana Cruz-Araiza, of Wixaritari-Chichimeca-Xicana descent, was born on occupied Yokut land. Her parents migrated to Farmersville in Tulare County from Teocaltiche, Xalisco in the early 1990s. A childhood of poverty and violence led to her involvement in gangs, but Cruz-Araiza overcame great obstacles to become the first person in her family to graduate from college. She earned a degree in ethnic studies from CSU Stanislaus and now works as a mentor for high opportunity youth in Kern County, focusing on healing, student advocacy and social change.
- Cecilia Moreno, of Yokut and Mexican descent, grew up in Orosi. Since childhood, she has been involved in a number of Native American language and cultural revitalization programs. She speaks Tachi, her native language, and is committed to keeping her native language and traditions alive. Moreno studied social sciences at UC Merced and continues to work with programs across California that are dedicated to the revival and preservation of Native cultures and languages.
- Mercedes Penam was born to impoverished Central American refugees that fled their homeland’s violent civil wars. Her childhood struggles led her to study social

movements and advocate for the oppressed. She settled in Merced County after graduating from UC Merced and works towards healing and educating disadvantaged communities with a newly developed art collective that addresses neo-colonization, labor exploitation, incarceration and reproductive labor.

- Maria Torres is a 2019 graduate of Edison High School in Fresno. Currently an art major at Fresno City College with aspirations to pursue a career in animation, she enjoys creative outlets that include photography, storytelling, journalism and graphic design. She is active in the Youth Leadership Institute.

The Pan Valley Institute has hosted a number of fellowship programs since their founding 20 years ago. Over the years, they have worked to prepare fellows to be the Valley's next generation of cultural leaders. The majority of participants come from immigrant or refugee families, or are themselves immigrants or refugees.

As with past fellowship programs, ArteVism will encourage fellows to build strong social and professional networks and institutional relationships, enabling them to work together with their peers to effectively address issues that are meaningful to their communities. Through the emotional impact of these theatre productions, participants will be able to influence the social attitudes of the electorate.

"One of the goals of ArteVism is to help our Latinx and Indigenous youth to be seen as productive agents of social change," said Nateras. "Ultimately, this cultural work will challenge the histories of invisibility, marginalization and social inequity that currently exist in the Central Valley."

For more on the ArteVism fellowship program, please contact Myrna Martinez Nateras, (559) 222-7678 or MNateras@afsc.org.

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Founded in 1998 as a project of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Pan Valley Institute (PVI) creates safe spaces for immigrants and refugees to learn from one another, and design organizing strategies for promoting social change and building community. To increase immigrant participation and power across California's Central Valley, PVI brings a diverse range of grassroots immigrant leaders together through cultural gatherings, leadership trainings, thematic workshops, retreats and its fellowship program - the Tamejavi Cultural Organizing Fellowship Program (TCOFP). We see cultural organizing as a concrete step toward building a community that is cohesive and capable of responding to social challenges. AFSC is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service. Its work is based on the belief in the worth of every person and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.