



Image: From Alisha B Wormsley's open-to-the-public filming at the African Healing Garden in Pittsburgh, PA.

How Art Inspires Change: A Check-In with 2023 Anonymous Was A Woman Environmental Art Grants Recipients

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With the launch of the 2025 grant cycle, we spotlight projects that have impacted communities across the US.

[The Anonymous Was A Woman Environmental Art Grants](#) (AWAW EAG) program is now open for its fourth cycle, with opportunities for women-identifying artists to receive up to \$20,000 to support their environmental art projects that inspire thought, action, and ethical engagement.

AWAW EAG projects not only point at problems, but aim to engage an environmental issue at some scale. The intended impact of the project is an important factor in the selection process. All selected projects must benefit the public in some way by organizing a public engagement within the grant term; it must be free to attend, open to the general public, and must add value to the public sphere.

Here, we check in with a few of the 2023 AWAWEAG recipients to learn more about their work and how they engaged local communities in activities that inspired learning, sharing, and empowerment.

Meg Griffiths; [*Impossible Town*](#); Minden, WV



Image Detail: Photo from “Impossible Town’s” regional screening tour, Photo Courtesy of Meg Griffiths

Impossible Town is a feature-length documentary about one woman’s quest to save a toxic West Virginia town. When her father dies unexpectedly, Dr. Ayne Amjad is thrust to the helm of a decades-long struggle to aid Minden, a southern West Virginia town beset by cancer-causing chemicals. Ayne is caught between her dream of raising a family and an audacious but all-consuming plan to relocate the town and bring closure to her father’s work.

Using funds from the AWAWEAG, Griffiths and her team hired an impact producer from environmental nonprofit The Redford Center, finished production, and presented the documentary to key audiences, including Appalachian communities impacted by environmental issues and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Their 10-day regional screening tour across West Virginia and Pennsylvania featured nine distinct screening events that reached nearly 1,000 viewers. The screenings led to constructive dialogue with community members and the EPA.

The team is also finalizing an impact campaign with their colleagues at the Redford Center that will focus on healing communities with environmental trauma, support for grassroots activists, and using the film as a tool for depolarization and empathy.

Sarah Kavage; [WATER BEARERS](#); Seattle, WA



Image Detail: “WATER BEARERS” (in progress); 2024; living willow; Tukwila, WA (Duwamish River); Photo Courtesy of Sarah Kavage

WATER BEARERS are restorative living willow sculptures along Seattle’s Duwamish River created with crews from DirtCorps, a green jobs training program and environmental restoration business.

Staked into the ground, willow cuttings grow vigorously, preventing erosion and creating a habitat for fish, birds, and other creatures. As the artwork continues to grow, it will contribute to the restoration of the Duwamish River, which has been subject to industrial development and pollution, dredging, and erasure since the early 1900s and is now in the process of a multi-decade Superfund cleanup.

The *WATER BEARERS* project piloted the use of spiling—a “soft” erosion control method primarily used in the UK—by constructing a living willow fence along the slope to stabilize the area. This technique is applicable to other areas of the Duwamish River, where the steep slopes prohibit restoration crews from getting less than 15 feet to the slope edge and therefore inhibits the effectiveness of restoration efforts.

Completed by neighbors, friends, and other community members, *WATER BEARERS* has transformed a neglected park into a valuable neighborhood amenity through the artwork and restoration efforts. It is an ongoing project that Kavage plans to expand and steward over time.

Says Kavage: “This project has meant a great deal to me, the City of Tukwila’s Green Tukwila restoration program, and the people that participated. It allowed me to push the boundaries of not just art, but restoration practice, in the Pacific Northwest. The spiling fence is not something we have encountered elsewhere in the area and would not have been possible to create as part of a standard restoration project. The fact that it is also

art and integrated into the rest of the sculptural elements is yet another level of complexity and merging of form and function.”

Jaclyn Fawn Mendez; [Rez Dayze](#); Akwesasne Reservation, NY



Image Detail: “Love for the Klamath and ‘Oohl,” 2023, cover page, coloring book, Courtesy of Jaclyn Fawn Mendez

Rez Dayze is a graphic multimedia romantic comedy illustrating next gen Indigenous Creation heroes navigating through colonial forces to save their Rez from encroaching land development projects.

To ensure the future of their rez and community, these next gen heroes must harness their ancestral powers to rise above their primal tendencies. *Rez Dayze* will employ its charming cast to address the impacts of energy extraction companies in Native communities, food sovereignty, blood quantum, and sexual liberation.

Since receiving the AWAWEAG, Mendez has completed a year-long writing program with the Changemakers Authors Cohort. The cohort helped develop the project’s goals and distribution circuit, in addition to drafting a project outline that will be transformed into the visual narrative for *Rez Dayze*. Two *Rez Dayze* zines are also anticipated as a result of AWAWEAG project funding.

The project was recognized with a \$10,000 NYSCA Grant that will support the printed publication and an immersive *Rez Dayze* website. The website will include a community support page for how individuals can uplift ongoing Indigenous-led movements, an artist hub for Native graphic artists available for hire for campaign art, and comic hosting.

Says Mendez: “The Anonymous Was a Woman Environmental Art Grant was very important in uplifting my project and community work. It took a chance on a grand

project that is not only a personal dream, but a budding platform for my community to share laughter and medicine.”

Lauren Shapiro; [*The Blue Horizon Project*](#); Miami, FL



Image Detail: A volunteer presses clay into molds of various corals that Lauren Shapiro created for “The Blue Horizon Project,” Photo Courtesy of Lauren Shapiro

The Blue Horizon Project is a community-driven public sculpture that will be crafted from ceramic corals replicated from 3D scans. Designed to evoke the sensation of being submerged beneath the sea, the monumental sinking arch will address the imminent threat of sea level rise and coral decline and promotes collective action.

Shapiro is sourcing the 3D coral models globally from scientific databases and her own scuba excursions, using digital fabrication techniques to capture their essence in friezes and reliefs. Adorned with ceramic flora and fauna, the arch will highlight the historical significance of Florida’s calcified coral reefs (now the foundational Oolite limestone rock), once part of a vast marine ecosystem.

Since receiving the AWA EAG, Shapiro has enhanced the visibility and viability of *The Blue Horizon Project* by collaborating with local organizations, institutions, and partners. This includes a partnership with the local organization Commissioner where Shapiro co-hosted two snorkel expeditions that provided participants a firsthand look at her underwater scanning process and educated them about *The Blue Horizon Project*. During these expeditions, she collected scans of South Florida corals, expanding her model database.

Says Shapiro: “*The Blue Horizon Project* has allowed me to further explore a major pillar of my practice: collaboration. The workshops that I’ve held were not only essential to amassing material to build the sculpture, but have helped introduce the community

directly to the artistic process; as participants have been pressing clay into molds of various corals that I've created, I've been firing and glazing their work product so the ceramic corals can eventually clad the sinking arch. This hands-on involvement not only enriches the final artwork but also fosters a sense of shared responsibility for Miami's environmental future."

Alisha B Wormsley; *Children of NAN: a Survival Guide*;
Pittsburgh, PA



Image: From the open-to-the-public filming at the African Healing Garden in Pittsburgh, PA, where lifetime Pittsburgh resident Betty Lane (center) was honored, Photo Courtesy of Alisha B Wormsley.

Children of NAN: a Survival Guide is a film for future Black femmes that spans Black womxn's relationship to craft, land/space, and spirit. It will feature a series of performed tutorials, rituals, survival strategies on various landscapes staged in a mobile set handcrafted by Wormsley.

The set is mobile not just for convenience but as a signifier of our migrant relationship to land and landscape. Ancestrally adapting to weather, plant-life, water, and resources in every part of this country and beyond.

Since receiving the AWAW EAG, Wormsley has held events including a big, open-to-the-public filming at the African Healing Garden in Pittsburgh. The event honored activist and lifetime Pittsburgh resident Betty Lane, who started the Living Waters of Larimer, a group of water stewards for the neighborhood of Larimer, which has experienced flooding issues. Lane has been buying plots of land in Larimer for 30 years, making affordable housing and community gardens. Her most beloved garden is the African Healing Garden, a place for her community to heal and survive the violence and gentrification happening there.

In addition to the Pittsburgh events, Wormsley has traveled to film at other locations across the United States where Black femmes are connecting to the land and acting as stewards in many different ways.

The 2025 cycle of the [Anonymous Was A Woman Environmental Art Grants](#) program is open now through 5:00 PM ET Tuesday, April 15. [Find out about additional awards and grants here](#). [Sign up for our free bi-weekly newsletter](#) to receive announcements about future NYFA events and programs.