

ARTS FOR GENDER EQUALITY



**Leading with Passion,
Creating with Purpose:**

**Exploring Art as a
Tool to Ignite
Women's Advocacy &
Leadership**

Overview

Throughout history, art has been central to social change. Its use has been significant in documenting historic events and shaping futures. Through support from the Rockefeller Foundation, CARE spearheaded the [Arts for Gender Equality Fellowship \(A4GE\)](#) that supported a cohort of visionary artists to ignite conversations that can lead to social change. These individuals are part of a growing network of artists building connections through the fellowship. Journey through their activism and how through their power of poetry, paint and photography – enhance discussions on social change.

The Power of Art and Activism

Art is one of our most powerful tools in creating a more gender equitable world because it has the profound ability to transcend language barriers and communicate complex emotions and experiences in a universally relatable way. Artists are able to capture the struggles, triumphs, and resilience of communities and share them with the world. In the case of the Arts for Gender Equality fellowship, this power of art to evoke empathy and inspire action has been strategically combined with CARE's long history in advocating for the rights of women and girls globally, to create an innovative model for fighting and building a more just and equitable world. Recognizing that artists that are in the front lines of activism use their artistry to enact change, we recognize that issues that they raise are not only put in the spotlight, but they are too. This tends to create concerns on their safety and security. In such, artists need to be supported by allies and institutions that can help center wellbeing and safety as a core essence in the practice of their work.

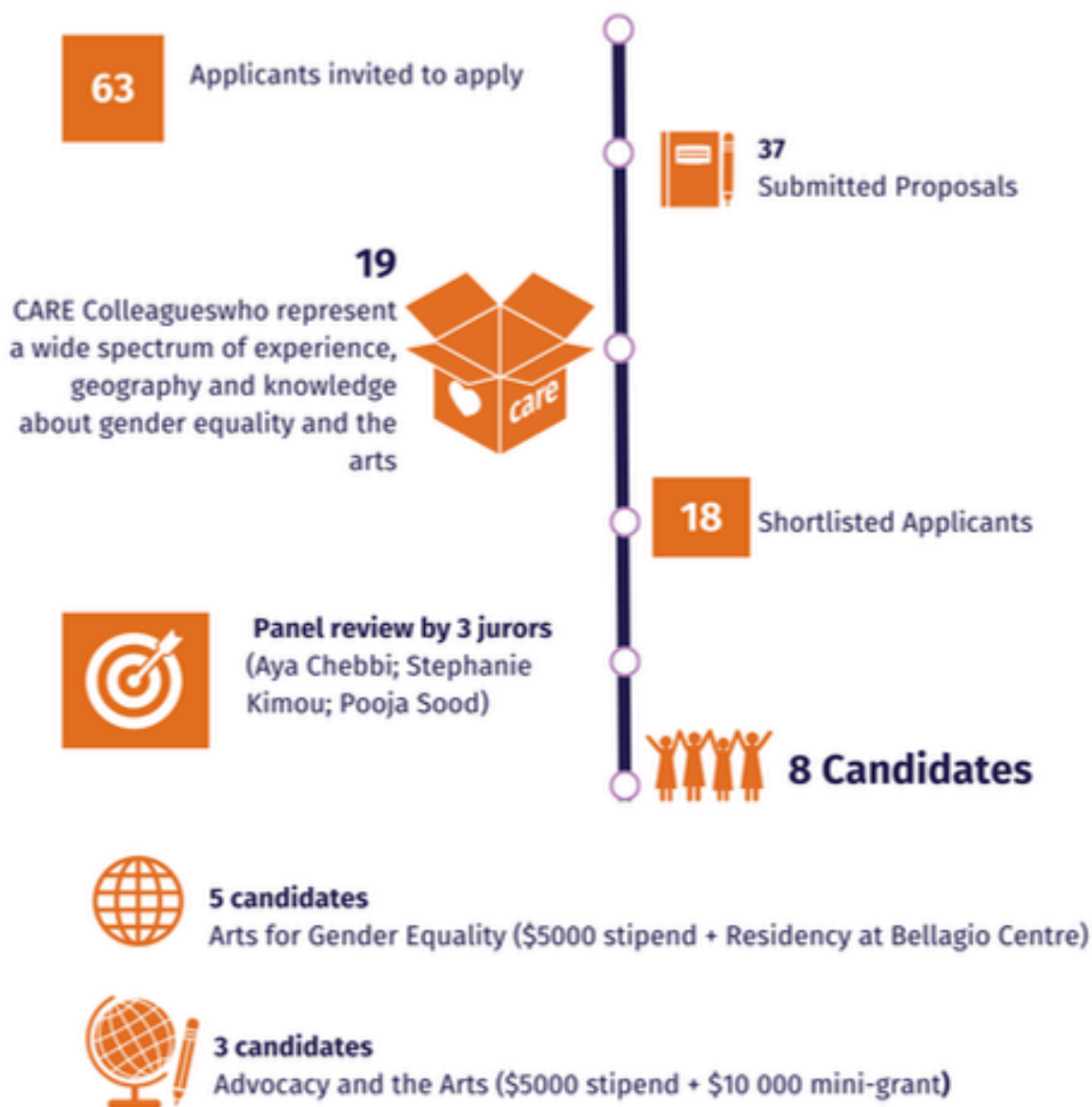
"I think there's so many ways that art can be strategically employed that really do help people shift their thinking, and if not shift their thinking immediately, then at least it gave them a dialogue that they couldn't have before. Art invites dialogue, it is something that lends itself to a deeper appreciation for humanity." - Bethany Martin-Breen, Lead Convenings & Networks, The Rockefeller Foundation

"To be able to speak this other language to the wider world, it's so amazing. The fact that they are able to think about all of these other things that are outside of what I consider like gender equality, development work, gender equality, but that they are actually working at the core of gender equality. That is a magical seat to be sitting in." - Jayne Chu, Director of Development, Foundation Partnerships CARE

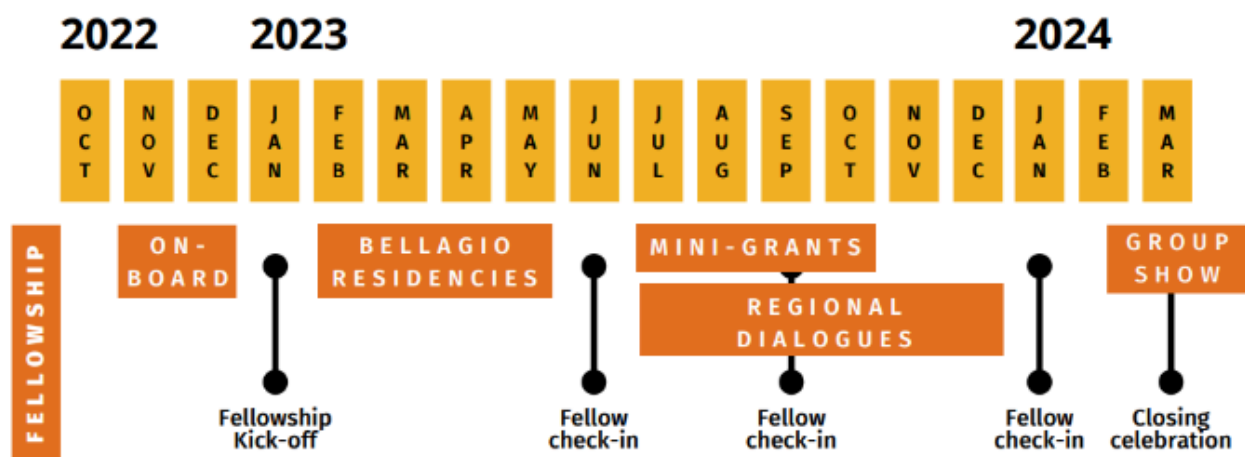
"Artists are able to say things through their art that society needs to hear and are courageous and don't always follow social norms and therefore able to push the boundaries in a way that mainstream society don't necessarily subscribe to or follow." - Esther Watts, Snr Director Gender Justice CARE USA

A4GE - The Journey

Application Process



TIMELINE



Grant Outcomes

ARTS for EQUITY MODEL

What has emerged from this grant is an innovative project that works at the intersection of arts and gender justice. This grant allowed for the design and implementation of an **Arts for Equity Model**, a way to support the leadership and voice of women and non-binary artists advancing gender justice through their work and advocating for social change and opportunity for all. This fellowship pilot eight artists in creative activism across two tracks:

- a. Artist Residencies - 5 fellows gained the opportunity to join a month-long artist residency program at the Bellagio Center, Italy. Fellows participated in the residency alongside a wider network of Bellagio residents who came from academic, political, civic, and arts backgrounds.
- b. Arts and Advocacy - 3 fellows (in lieu of a residency) received grants to advance their work in their own contexts.

Guiding this project were a set of tenets, which extended from selection to project implementation.

- Advancing equity and inclusion by integrating and embodying values of gender justice and equality
- Honoring representation across different experiences and identities
- Decolonial practices - supporting authentic relationships at the center of how we operate as a project, and how artists work in communities
- Connecting work to advocacy and organizing toward broader influences

EXPANDED COMMUNITY CONNECTED TO GENERATION EQUALITY

- Engagement and creative activism events were led in Thailand, Nigeria, and Michigan.
- 16 Days of Activism of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Webinar
- A programmatic component for CARE's Women's Voice and Leadership Pillar that engages feminist activists through art-based strategies and helps to inform future partnerships and collaborations within the gender equality space

OUTREACH ASSETS

- Creation and distribution of video showcasing the fellowship
- Evaluation and publication showcasing the artists



"We wanted to connect with artists as people and as activators in their own community, and not as producers. They have a way of speaking to their audiences that we don't have."

EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS

The fellowship was a deeply visceral, personal, and emotional experience, unique to each fellow. Additionally, the role that art plays in catalyzing social change is extremely layered with the relationship between the artist as an individual, their work (as artists and as activists), their communities (their artistic community, their organizations or institutions, their homes, the people they represent etc.) being a complex web of influences and impact.

TIME & SPACE

The most significant impact that all the fellows noted (regardless of what track they were on) was that the fellowship gifted them the time and space to invest in themselves and their art. Given the nature of their lives (full-time work in organizations, primary care-takers in families, living in precarious often dangerous environments etc.), they rarely get the opportunity to slow down and focus on themselves and their art. The residency gave them a safe, supportive space for them to rest, recharge and focus and those not able to attend the residency were able to create time and space for themselves through the financial support they were offered.

DEEPEN THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ART


The time, space, and financial support enabled the fellows to explore themselves and their work in deeper, more substantive ways. Artists were able to use the fellowship to ask difficult questions of themselves, conduct research, learn new skills, experiment with new styles, and seek feedback, among a few of the methods mentioned.

BRING THEIR IDEAS TO REALITY

Through the fellowship, the artists were able to move their projects forward in a variety of ways. For example, conducting deep research as part of a novel, the staging of direct action, the development and production of a collection of poetry, and curating exhibits and local action. All the projects shared a common overarching goal of working towards gender equity.

"I definitely feel like when I received the fellowship, I was on a burnout and now I'm no longer on a burnout. But it was an uncomfortable journey through the burnout. Now I feel activated and myself again. We don't manage our overwhelm because in ending gender-based violence your work is never done. For me that's revolutionary in these times."

"I don't want my poetry to just be responsive. I want it to be long term. I want it to be more generative. I want it to be futuristic...Response generally has a lot of anger, an important emotion in the writing, but I also wanted it to not be only emotion. So I think when I was there, just the silence of that place, the fact that there is no attacking, there is no disturbance. When I'm there.. there was this comfort, and I could just sit and write in more beautiful, more new ways."



In this regard, measuring the impact of the various manifestations of their art on their environments and communities is extremely difficult. However, it's important to note a few examples of the role the fellows' work played towards creating societal change:

- **Shifting individual mindsets:** A police officer that attended a photographic exhibition commented on how the exhibition made him think differently about the role of women in Nigeria.
- **Enabling cultural shifts:** The writing of poetry that engages not just the pain and struggles of Muslim women in current-day India, but also their dreams, joys, movements, assertion, and self-representations, and how these aspects seek to shift dominant narratives about themselves.
- **Causing disruption:** A collective action “Meet to Sleep” in India where women sleep in public spaces to both protest the right to be safe but also a powerful collective expression of solidarity.
- **Creating safe spaces:** A private poetry reading of queer folk where people could be vulnerable in a country where they are always at risk and in danger.
- **Envisioning alternative futures:** Bringing women from different countries across Latin America together to collaborate and create their feminist futures.
- **Representing the marginalized:** The development of a novel that surfaces and tells the stories of Black women seamstresses.
- **Making reality visible:** The “I Never Ask For It” project builds testimonials of clothing. Survivors of sexual assault bring the garment they wore when they experienced sexual violence.
- **Aiding and amplifying social movements:** Street poetry that is performed during protests

BUILDING THEIR NETWORKS


The fellowship enabled the forming of new networks across a variety of lines:

The Fellowship Network: The fellows come from 7 different countries and work in a variety of artistic mediums. The opportunity to connect with each other as a cohort was invaluable with many identifying the strength that comes from solidarity and the knowledge that they are not in this (the struggle for gender equality) alone.

The Bellagio Network: Those attending the residency highlighted the connections they made with those in the Bellagio Residency and the fact that those connections and relationships have continued. Residents provided the fellows with support, feedback and inspiration. Fellows also appreciated the opportunities to share their work and contexts with those residents.

Artistic Networks: The fellowship enabled fellows to pursue collaborations that would not have been possible without the financial support of the stipends and grants. These collaborations occurred across artistic mediums (for example, bringing musicians, writers, designers, and poets together) and enabled transnational collaborations (for example, one fellow sought additional funding to hold events in Detroit, Guatemala and Costa Rica).


International Networks: The fellowship offered the fellows an international platform to showcase their work. In addition, the Bellagio Residency is considered a prestigious opportunity with high profile alumni.



Meet The Fellows




**Gloriann
Sacha Antonetty**

 Writer
Artist Residency




Sabika Abbas

 Poet
Arts and Advocacy




Jasmeen Patheja

 Interdisciplinary
Artist Residency




Dayna Ash

 Performace/Playwright
Arts & Advocacy



Etinosa Yvonne

 Photographer
Arts and Advocacy




Emilia Yang

  Interdisciplinary
Artist Residency



Soe Yu Nwe

 Mixed Media Visual Artist
Arts and Advocacy



Sungi Mlengeya

 Painter
Artist Residency

Sabika

Abbas



Sabika is an award-winning translator, performance poet and organizer and advocate for social justice and human rights. She is also the co-editor of the Bystander Anthology and Senior Editor of the SAAG Anthology. Sabika supports artist communities across the globe in the arts, training, and design.

How have you used your art for advocacy?

I perform in public spaces. Two aspects that I will like to share when Muslim women were being villainised in India, when people of our community were being lynched in public. When vocal voices of Muslim women were being tarnished, trolled and threatened, I decided to take over public spaces and perform my poems of resistance and celebration. So that every passerby could hear us! When I could no longer perform due to the pandemic, I painted poems on the walls. To tell our stories. Collective poems, written by Muslim women together challenging the misogynist, fascist, state. It started so many spaces to talk, to have conversations, to hear from each other. We now have reading circles, more and more women writing poems.

Do you believe artist spaces can be more inclusive? How do we push for gender equality in these spaces?

There are many ways artist spaces can be more inclusive. However, there is a need to continue to engage, educate as well as push for artist spaces to be more inclusive and embrace gender equality. Fellowships like this are one way we can highlight the work of artists, especially female artists. We need more organizations to collaborate with art institutions and open up opportunities for artists in a bid to promote gender equality. There also needs to be a conscious effort when opportunities are created to ensure that these opportunities recognize some of the challenges that female artists face that sometimes make it difficult for them to put themselves out there as well as spend time creating works. For instance, navigating motherhood as an artist especially in certain regions of the world where navigating motherhood is almost always left to the woman, female artists struggling with premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) amongst others. More art institutions and art spaces need to recognize the challenges that female artists encounter which sometimes stifles their creativity. We also need more women to lead more art institutions.



Emilia Yang

Emilia Yang is a Central American artist, memory organizer and scholar who uses expanded forms of digital media as her art form. Having earned her PhD in Interdisciplinary Media Arts + Practice at the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, Yang's artworks and creative projects have garnered international recognition in various global media publications and shown in various venues across the Americas.

Emilia on the power of art:

"I think art is a humanizing practice, a vulnerability praxis. It allows us to translate and articulate things and materials that language sometimes fails to express, it can serve for community building, as a tool for relationality, for carving spaces that are more free and caring, it can help us orient and ground ourselves."





Gloriann Sacha

Antonetty.

Gloriann Sacha Antonetty Lebrón is an Afropuertorican writer, communication strategist and professor. She is the founder of Revista étnica. As a writer, she has published collection of poems: Hebras. In addition to having stories published in the anthologies: Cuentos de Huracán, Maraña of Tejedoras de Palabras, Palenque: Puerto Rican anthology of thematic “negrista”, antiracist, Africanist and afrodescendant. She has also published in the Academia magazine of EDP University, Boreales, Letras Magazine of the UMET, Afrofémimas among others.



“Gender justice and decolonization cannot happen without the arts. The arts give us the possibility to remove barriers and be free in unimaginable ways.”

What is the power of connecting artists working at the intersection of arts and social movements across different geographies?

Us as artists have a monumental power when we connect from our intersectionalities and in the arts and social movements because we integrate our sensibilities and crafts to make possible change narratives that accelerate social change.



Jasmin

Patheja

Jasmeen Patheja is an artist in public service, committed to ending violence against women, girls and all persons. Patheja designs methodologies to build testimonials of violence against women. Her practice is based on listening to lived experiences. It rests on the power of feminist solidarities. She works with themes including fear, public and private memory, imagination, shame, desire, belonging, empathy, and the weight of defense. Her work has garnered international recognition, including the prestigious Visible Award, awarded for socially engaged art practice. She was recently awarded the Jane Lombard Fellowship by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School, New York. She is an artist in residence at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology.

On her understanding of the power arts has in advocacy:

“I’m not saying artists have all the answers, but artists have an approach that is not didactic, that isn’t sitting with a stick saying “this is right and this is wrong”. But it allows for experience building, it allows empathy building”



installation of empathy at the India Gate



Sungi Mlengeya

Sungi is a self-taught artist known for her minimalist aesthetic, with a curious use of negative space. Most of the works consist of dark figures in minimal shades of black and browns against perfectly white backgrounds, a commemoration of women who surround her. In 2020, Sungi was honoured in Apollo 40 Under 40 Africa, a selection of the most inspirational young people in the African art world; and in 2022 graced the Johnnie Walker and Trace Africa Top 30 list of leading creatives in the continent.

Who has shaped the way you show up today as an artist and/or activist?

Many people came into play for the person I am today; including great teachers and mentors, parents who supported my craft, some inspirational women in my life, and very many imagined personas. I read a lot of stories growing up, I disappeared into the different worlds of the characters and could become anyone anywhere. These stories ingrained in me the many possibilities that can exist, as long as I wanted them to. The countless authors of these stories grounded in me imagination and confidence to do what I wanted.

On her understanding of the power of art in activism:

“Art enables us to reimagine and represent the world in ways that we want, and these new presentations can have the potential to impact lives. When artists give us creations of justice and freedom, then there is possibility for such change.”



Soe Yu Nwe

Soe is a mixed media artist from Myanmar working on ceramic sculpture, drawing and installation. Her cross-cultural experience has inspired her to reflect upon identity through making. Through transfiguration of emotional landscape by poetically depicting nature and body in parts, she explores the idea of displacement, her family's migration history and the complexities of individual identity.

How does your art celebrate, raise awareness for, or give voice to women?

My work comes from my feelings on the role and place of women imposed by custom and religion within the conservative society of Myanmar and traditional Chinese culture. I believe that by sharing my thoughts on these issues on a global platform, I am able to raise awareness on some level and give visibility to women issues including violence against women in Myanmar." In my work, I use the imagery of the snake to explore and tell the story of how in various culture, patriarchy or feminine power has been toppled by patriarchy through the perpetuation of harmful myths about women and menstruation."

How can art be used to shatter barriers for women? Are there ways artists can use their work to enter decision-making spaces where women's rights/roles/responsibilities are being discussed?

I think art is a tool that can be used to ask questions, generate discussions and perhaps educate too. I think the internet is also becoming a powerful tool in shaping the public's perception and thoughts on social issues and therefore a major platform where art can break cultural, language or physical barriers to mobilize a crowd. When some protest artwork becomes viral because of the visceral immediate reaction the audience feels, it mobilizes them further to protest. Whether that reaches the decision-making space of the politicians, that would depend on the type of government they have.



Etinosa

Yvonne

Etinosa Yvonne is a self-taught documentary photographer and visual artist based in Nigeria. She works with various art forms including photos and videos. The primary focus of her work is the exploration of themes related to culture, religion, tradition, the environment, the human condition and social injustice. Her works have been exhibited internationally, and has been awarded with grants from National Geographic Society, Art X, Women Photograph as well as an award from National Geographic in partnership with Lagos Photo and the Royal Photographic Society for her project; It's All In My Head.

How can art be used to shatter barriers for women? Are there ways artists can use their work to enter decision-making spaces where women's rights/roles/responsibilities are being discussed?

There are several ways that art can be used to shatter barriers for women. As a documentary photographer/multidisciplinary artist, one of the things I try to do beyond collecting and documenting the stories of women in my society is to ensure that I find and where possible create ways that the stories I collect are shared so that it can reach a wider audience. This can be through exhibitions or presentations amongst others. By collaborating and partnering with key stakeholders, artists can enter into unlikely and necessary partnerships that will avail them the opportunity to share their work in a bid to advocate and raise awareness about the issues they are working on. A good example of this was my collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund Sexual & Reproductive Health Agency (UNFPA).



In 2019, I collaborated with them to examine the psychological impact of gender based violence on girls and women in conflict areas. The outcome of the research was a series of images and video art. The project was launched in 2020 during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. The project went on to be shown at the 2022 Berlin Biennale as well as a recent exhibition titled Malevolence which looks at aspects of gender-based violence and society's attitudes towards the victims and perpetrators of such crimes, highlighting the need for radical change.

Art as a Tool of Advocacy - Why it matters at CARE

The Arts for Gender Equality Fellowship is a flagship project, launched in 2023 with the aim to drive social change through art-based approaches. This is important for CARE as we center gender equality in all we do, to end gender-based violence, shift social norms through interrogating systematic structures that undermine their power and empower women and girls' voices and leadership.

Art bears the unique ability to communicate on issues beyond the boundaries of traditional communication and evoke emotions that catalyze change – especially on a personal level. It also serves as an archivist – documenting key moments in history that have either sparked, marked or cemented change.

We believe that engaging local artists and activists in our work is a key pathway for our future programming and has the power to challenge social norms and catalyze cultural shifts that traditional approaches typically don't.

Looking ahead, we see the fellowship working deeply with women's rights and women's lead organizations, incorporated into our programmatic work to contribute to reaching our overall goal of 50 million women and girls having greater gender equality.





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