

HYPERALLERGIC

United States Artists Awards \$50K Grants to \$50K Fellows

Visual artists Edra Soto and Eric-Paul Riege are among the recipients of this year's unrestricted award.

By Isra Farfan January 14, 2026



Edra Soto's 2025 "place of dwelling" (image courtesy Edra Soto)

United States Artists (USA), a Chicago-based nonprofit, has named 50 artists across disciplines to receive its annual \$50,000 unrestricted cash award.

After a year-long selection process, which includes nominations, the organization awarded USA Fellowships to artists across the country in 10 discipline categories: visual art, architecture and design, craft, writing, dance, film, music, theater and performance, and traditional arts and media.

This year's awardee class marks the USA Fellowship's 20th year. The organization considers

artists with singular artistic visions who have made an impact in their respective disciplines. Among this year's winners for the visual arts category are Chicago-based artist and curator Edra Soto, whose work contends with diasporic identity; New Mexico-based interdisciplinary weaver Eric-Paul Riege; and Los Angeles-based multidisciplinary artist Mercedes Dorame.

In an interview with Hyperallergic, USA Program Director Anne Ishii said the organization was established by a group of funders who "recognized a huge gap being left by public funding."

Unlike funding granted by agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for specific projects, the USA Fellowship is an unrestricted award, allowing artists to spend their prize however they like. These stipulations allow awardees to direct their awards toward living costs, such as healthcare.

"We want the artists to feel like they're in a sustainable work environment, and we're supplementing our artists as people, so that they can make the decisions around how they can support themselves," Ishii told Hyperallergic in a phone call. "Too often, I think what happens is, when it's project-based, there's now the pressure to deliver something that's beholden to the criteria of yet another overseer."

The unrestricted fellowship turns 20 as artists and cultural organizations across the country face a complicated new public funding landscape, one defined by Trump-ordered mass grant terminations at agencies like the NEA and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

While the fellowship doesn't control how artists spend their award, USA does survey its artists about what they intend to do with the funds. Increasingly, over the past 20 years, artists have shifted from stating that they will fund their practice to addressing housing, healthcare, and livability.

Many of the artistic practices in this year's cohort, Ishii observed, emphasize legacy and the archive. "There's a lot being said about holding that information, and I do suspect that it is somewhat in response to a concern that we're going to lose it," Ishii said.

The complete list of 2026 USA Visual Art Fellowship recipients is below.

Visual Art

Edra Soto — Interdisciplinary Artist — Chicago, IL

Eric-Paul Riege — Maker, Performer, and Weaver — Na'ízhoozhí or Gallup, NM

Macon Reed — Interdisciplinary Artist — New Orleans, LA

Maia Chao — Artist — Philadelphia, PA

Mercedes Dorame — Multidisciplinary Artist — Los Angeles, CA

Raheleh Filsoofi — Itinerant and Interdisciplinary Artist — Nashville, TN