



MUSICIAN

**Oompa (Lakiyra Williams)**

Oompa is a nationally-acclaimed, Boston-born poet, rapper and educator, forever representing the queer, black, orphaned, hood kids. Oompa is the Boston Music Awards 2018 Unsigned Artist of the Year, a 2018 LAB Grant recipient, 2018 Button Poetry Chapbook Contest Finalist, and the 2017 Women of the World Poetry Slam. Her debut album, *Nov. 3*, received accolades, and she is currently preparing the release of her second album, *Cleo*.



PERFORMING ARTIST/STORYTELLER

**Valerie Stephens**

Valerie Stephens, a native Bostonian, is an award-winning performing artist with a passion for history. An actor, storyteller, vocalist, writer and producer, she has toured nationally and performed on many Boston area stages. Her original works include plays, historical pieces and tributes to singer Nina Simone. She believes in the transformative power of art on the personal *and* community levels and over the last 35 years has created performance art and programming that celebrates that power.



MUSICIAN

**Billy Dean Thomas**

Billy Dean Thomas, AKA “The Queer B.I.G.” is a hip-hop recording artist born and raised in Harlem, but residing in Boston. Billy challenges the music industry with lyrics that align with intersectional feminism, social justice and growing up in NYC. After performing on ABC’s *The View* and releasing the EP *Rocky Barboa*, Billy was nominated for two Boston Music Awards and has performed at the Museum of Fine Arts, Spotify and the House of Blues Boston.



CERAMICIST

**Kyla Toomey**

Kyla Toomey is a Boston-based ceramic artist. Her work simultaneously draws from Modernism and Craft, and is charged with a sense of materiality and simplicity. She is fascinated with the play of opposing forces within an object, and human interaction with materials. She splits her time between making and teaching: She has taught at many institutions including The Commonwealth School, The School of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Office for the Arts at Harvard University.

**Supporting the Brother Thomas Fellowships**



**The ceramic work** of Brother Thomas Bezanson is displayed in more than 80 museums around the world, including New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Vatican. The largest and most diverse collection is in the Pucker Gallery on Newbury Street in Boston. Owners Sue and Bernie Pucker had represented Brother Thomas’ work over the decades and became his close friends. Toward the end of his life, they joined forces to create a legacy to benefit

other artists: Today, proceeds of the sale of his works held by the Pucker Gallery go to the Brother Thomas Fellowships.

Brother Thomas knew that for most artists, the journey is a challenging one, and that even established artists may struggle for the resources they need to advance their art. The biennial Brother Thomas Fellowship program supports and celebrates a diverse group of Greater Boston artists working at a high level of excellence in the visual, performing, literary, media and craft arts—bolstering their ability to thrive and create new work. The Foundation believes raising their visibility will also increase their access to galleries, residencies and commissions, and demonstrate the importance of artists to the vitality of Boston. Since 2007, \$840,000 in funding has been awarded to 56 Fellows. The quality and the range of their work are astounding, and matched by their intense dedication to their work. As former Brother Thomas Fellows welcome new award winners, a larger “fellowship” of encouragement and support has emerged in the community of artists.



If you’d like to join us in fulfilling Brother Thomas’ vision by expanding the Fellowship program, you may *contribute directly* to the Brother Thomas Fund. If you are a donor or a collector who would like to learn more about Brother Thomas’ works of art as a way of supporting the fund, please contact us at 617-338-1700.

**About the Boston Foundation** The Boston Foundation, Greater Boston’s community foundation, brings people and resources together to solve Boston’s big problems. Established in 1915, it is one of the largest community foundations in the nation—with net assets of \$1.3 billion. In 2018, the Foundation received \$203 million in new funds and the Foundation and its donors paid \$129 million in grants to nonprofit organizations. The Foundation works in close partnership with its donors, with more than 1,000 separate charitable funds established for the general benefit of the community or for special purposes. It also serves as a major civic leader, think tank and advocacy organization, commissioning research into the most critical issues of our time and helping to shape public policy designed to advance opportunity for everyone in Greater Boston. The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI), a consulting unit of the Foundation, designs and implements customized philanthropic strategies for families, foundations and corporations around the globe.

**For more information about the Boston Foundation**

**or the Brother Thomas Fellowships, call 617-338-1700 or visit [www.tbf.org](http://www.tbf.org).**



# Brother Thomas Fellowships



A SPECIAL ARTS INITIATIVE OF THE BOSTON FOUNDATION

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## From Our President and CEO

**Brother Thomas Bezanson** observed that art can “ferry us across that brook too broad for leaping.” It can also build bridges of discovery and understanding across chasms in our too-divided world. Above all, art in its countless forms can lead us to perceptions outside of our habitual patterns and give us insight into the experiences of others; it prompts contemplation, ideas and actions.

But art isn’t made from thin air. Brother Thomas knew this from his own experience. He was a gifted and renowned ceramic artist who had been helped by friends and visionaries at key points in his career. That support inspired in him a profound dream—to help other artists in similar ways. We are honored that he chose the Boston Foundation to make that dream a reality.

Arts and culture have been a priority of the Boston Foundation for more than a century, through funding cultural organizations directly, promoting arts education in the Boston Public Schools, public advocacy and leveraging culture as a catalyst for vibrant communities and neighborhoods. We are particularly blessed in Greater Boston to have a wealth of talented artists. Some have grown up in Boston’s neighborhoods—their work uniquely shaped by our local culture. Others have come from far corners of the world and enriched our region with tremendous talents influenced by their own cultural traditions.

One of the most powerful ways to strengthen arts and culture in Greater Boston is to support and celebrate this exceptionally diverse community of artists. Brother Thomas gave us the resources to do just that. With his dear friends Bernie and Sue Pucker, he established

the Brother Thomas Fund at the Boston Foundation, entrusting us with the resources from the sale of his magnificent work, and with the responsibility of operating the Brother Thomas Fellowships as a special arts initiative.

Fellows are mature professional artists nominated and selected by other artists in the area. Brother Thomas knew that the financial help that comes with the fellowships would be welcome, but also that the acknowledgment would be just as important. We at the Boston Foundation believe that the arts and artists are indispensable to our community. They reflect the diversity of our people and the richness of the cultures that comprise our city’s neighborhoods. They celebrate the best in us, shine a light on our darkest fears and struggles—and lift us up in hard times.

We are pleased to introduce the 2019 Brother Thomas Fellows in these pages.



Paul S. Grogan  
President and CEO of the Boston Foundation

Art ... is the  
language  
of the spirit  
that ferries  
us across  
that brook  
too broad  
for leaping.

— **Brother Thomas**



PERFORMING ARTIST

### Jorge Santiago Arce

Jorge Arce was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, a city known for its rich cultural traditions. In addition to lifelong training as an actor, dancer, singer, performer and cultural historian, he earned his B.A. in musical theater from Boston Conservatory (1985) and M.Ed. from Harvard University (1994). In 1987, he founded Humano Multicultural Project, sharing the history and arts of the Afro-Caribbean throughout the country. He was a Mass Cultural Council Traditional Arts Fellowship Finalist in 2012.



MUSICIAN

### Anjimile Chithambo

Anjimile is a queer and trans singer/songwriter based in Boston. As a Malawian-American raised in the suburbs of Richardson, Texas, Anjimile’s experiences with racism, homophobia and xenophobia in the Deep South and beyond helped to form the basis of their radical queer politics. Anjimile released their first recordings to local acclaim while at Northeastern University. The essence of their musical output is “a gooey center of warmth and tenderness” informed by the power of their intersectional identities.



DANCER / PERFORMER

### Shaumba-Yandje Dibinga

Shaumba-Yandje Dibinga is the daughter of Congolese immigrants and Founding Artistic Director of OrigiNation, which utilizes innovative and culturally significant programming to promote self-esteem, physical fitness and civic responsibility among youth. She uses the relationships she has built with young people to assist them in becoming the best versions of themselves and provides tools to deal with life’s most challenging issues. Her focus is dance, youth, the community and giving back.



MURALIST

### Robert Gibbs

Robert “Problak” Gibbs is a painter, muralist and graffiti artist who was one of six urban teens to co-found the nonprofit Artists For Humanity. Gibbs has conducted arts workshops for Girls, Inc., the Boston Foundation and YouthBuild. He has been a teacher and guest artist at the Eliot Middle School and has provided innovative programming to young men at Rayne Academy. His work has been featured in exhibitions around the country.

MUSICIAN/VIOLIST

### Ashleigh Gordon

Ashleigh Gordon is a violist, educator and arts administrator deeply committed to fostering cultural curiosity in Black history, culture and music. She is Artistic & Executive Director of Castle of our Skins, a concert and educational series devoted to celebrating Black artistry through music. In recognition for her work, she has been featured in *International Musician* magazine and *The Boston Globe*, and awarded the Charles Walton Diversity Advocate award from the American Federation of Musicians.



CERAMICIST

### Arthur Halvorsen

Arthur Halvorsen is a graduate of Maine College of Art, where he received his BFA in ceramics. Arthur’s work—which has been featured in *Ceramics Monthly* and *Pottery Making Illustrated*—uses bright colors, textures and patterns on earthenware, drawing from pop art, coloring books and tattoos. Arthur is a Mudflat Studio artist, and he teaches classes and workshops there and at Lesley University, among other venues nationally. He shares his latest work regularly on Instagram @arthurhalvorsen.



POET / PERFORMER

### Yara Liceaga-Rojas

Yara Liceaga-Rojas is a queer Afro-Caribbean poet, writer, performer, cultural administrator and educator from Puerto Rico who resides in the Boston area. Her multidisciplinary projects—*Acentos espesos/Thick Accents*; *El despojo: ¿Alguien ha/Has Anyone?*; and *Poetry Is Busy*—produce visibility for marginalized subjects. She’s authored four books of poetry; publishes frequently in newspapers, journals and anthologies; and offers creative writing, poetry and performance workshops in cultural centers, libraries and other institutions.



POET

### Porsha Olayiwola

Porsha Olayiwola is a writer, performer, educator and curator who uses Afrofuturism and surrealism to examine historical and current issues in the Black, woman and queer diasporas. She is an Individual World Poetry Slam champion and was named by Get Konneted! as one of Boston’s 100 Most Influential People of Color. Olayiwola is the current poet laureate for the City of Boston and has her first full collection of poetry forthcoming with Button Poetry in November 2019.

