



**Council on  
the Arts**

**KATHY HOCHUL**  
Governor

**PATRICK WILLINGHAM**  
Chair

**ERIKA MALLIN**  
Executive Director

February 11, 2026

Media Contact: Ann Marie Sekeres  
(212) 459-8859  
annmarie.sekeres@arts.ny.gov

## **Meet the First State of the Arts Fellows: The New York State Council on the Arts Announces the Three Artists to Collaborate with State Agencies**

### ***Governor's Initiative Places Artists to Work Alongside State Agencies for Creative Problem Solving***

The New York State Council on the Arts has announced the three inaugural fellows for the State of the Arts Fellowship Program. A new initiative from Governor Kathy Hochul, the State of the Arts Fellowship Program embeds NYS artists into state agencies to collaborate and develop creative solutions to specific agency challenges.

The inaugural placements are:

- Polymedia artist **Eto Otitigbe** (Brooklyn) will work alongside the **Office of General Services (OGS)** to revitalize Empire State Plaza in Albany with creative, community focused programming.
- **Cara Hanley** (Albany), a community-based artist and licensed social worker, will partner with the **Office of Mental Health (OMH)** to destigmatize mental health issues and promote access to OMH services.
- Interdisciplinary artist **sTo Len** (Glendale) and the **Office of Victim Services (OVS)** will increase awareness among underserved populations of the Fair Access to Victim Compensation Act.

Through a collaborative process, the fellows will work closely with State agencies to create new avenues for communication and connection, while highlighting the potential for innovative, cross-disciplinary solutions that leave a lasting impact on communities across New York. The program received over 400 applications from across the state. These inaugural projects are expected to be completed by March 2027. The next State of the Arts Fellowship opportunity will be announced by Summer 2026. Details will be posted at [arts.ny.gov](https://arts.ny.gov).

For more information about each artist, please visit <https://arts.ny.gov/SOAFellow>.

**NYSCA Executive Director Erika Mallin said**, "As critical thinkers and thought leaders, artists bring unique perspectives that help us reimagine solutions to our most pressing social challenges. NYSCA is proud to bring this important Governor's initiative to our fellow agencies and look forward to the groundbreaking work that will emerge from these collaborations."

**NYSCA Chair Patrick Willingham said**, "This program is a powerful statement about the value of the artist in New York State. Not just an opportunity for collaboration, the Fellowship program recognizes the critical importance of creative practice to better our everyday lives. Congratulations to all the inaugural fellows."

**Office of General Services Commissioner Jeanette Moy said,** "OGS is dedicated to strengthening the Empire State Plaza's ties with its surrounding communities and enhancing our public spaces to be more inclusive, dynamic, and representative of New York's diversity. We look forward to partnering with fellow Eto Otigbe, an artist with roots in Albany. His artistic practice thoughtfully blends history, community, and the natural world, key components of our Reconnect the Plaza initiative. We are grateful to Governor Hochul and NYSCA for this invaluable opportunity to introduce fresh perspectives to this space and foster further engagement with our neighbors."

**Office of Mental Health Commissioner Dr. Ann Sullivan said,** "There is such a healing component to art. It is especially impactful in supporting Individuals on their path to recovery from mental health concerns. Art also is a universal language with the transformative power to change perceptions about mental illness and recovery. We are delighted to be one of three host agencies for the New York State of the Arts Fellowship, enabling us to combine these two benefits to support recovery and reduce stigma. Fellow Cara Hanley has been specifically chosen for her experience in the mental health field and her artistic talent that will further our vision of increased appreciation, understanding and empathy of mental health and recovery. By engaging individuals in recovery alongside mental health care providers, this work will promote healing, affirm individual strengths, support self-determination and increase the understanding of mental health as a foundation for inclusive and resilient communities. This inspiring project demonstrates how Governor Hochul is highlighting the important work of state agencies through the creative arts."

**Office of Victim Services Director Bea Hanson said,** "OVS is proud to welcome sTo Len as our selected artist for this statewide fellowship program. His multidisciplinary, community-centered approach aligns with our mission to ensure survivors of crime and their families can access the services and support they need. We look forward to partnering with him to explore new, creative ways to increase awareness, reduce barriers, and strengthen connections between OVS and communities across New York."

**NY State of the Arts Fellow Eto Otigbe said,** "I grew up in Albany, and the art and architecture of the Empire State Plaza shaped my imagination and inspired my creative journey. Over the years I've shared my work internationally, and this fellowship offers the opportunity to bring those experiences back to my roots. The Plaza and the surrounding communities hold layered civic and historical narratives that deserve deeper attention. I want to activate the site's sensory and spatial qualities to tell those stories in collaboration with local creatives and the OGS."

**NY State of the Arts Fellow Cara Hanley said,** "Art has the unique ability to make the invisible visible. It can transform how we understand mental health: not as a deficit, but as a space for growth, resilience, and individuality. Through this fellowship, I aim to create work that not only uplifts the voices of those within the OMH system but also encourages broader community empathy, reduces stigma, and helps more people feel safe accessing support. This opportunity represents the heart of what I strive for: honoring the full humanity of those living with mental health challenges through creative practice."

**NY State of the Arts Fellow sTo Len said,** "As an artist, I am deeply committed to unconventional civic investigations that can help build a more creative relationship between our government and everyday citizens. The vast assistance that the Office of Victim Services provides survivors of crime and their families are essential services of care that must be accessible to all who may need it. I'm excited to work on creating new ways of connecting survivors of crime to OVS through art that acknowledges their resilience and advocates for their rights. How might we reimagine a state agency as an ally and a safe space to those in need and break

the often-intimidating barrier of bureaucracy?”

### **About the New York State Council on the Arts**

The mission of the New York State Council on the Arts is to foster and advance the full breadth of New York State’s arts, culture, and creativity for all. The Council on the Arts will award over \$161 million in FY 2026, serving organizations and artists across all 10 state regions. The Council on the Arts further advances New York’s creative culture by convening leaders in the field and providing organizational and professional development opportunities and informational resources. Created by Governor Nelson Rockefeller in 1960 and continued with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature, the Council is an agency that is part of the Executive Branch. For more information on NYSCA, please visit [arts.ny.gov](https://arts.ny.gov), and follow NYSCA's Facebook page, on X [@NYSCArts](https://twitter.com/NYSCArts) and Instagram [@NYSCouncilontheArts](https://www.instagram.com/NYSCouncilontheArts).