

Press Release

Brooklyn Museum and Instagram's @design Announce Recipients of the Inaugural #BlackDesignVisionaries Grant Program, Including an Additional Impact Grant

The Brooklyn Museum and @design, Instagram's official account dedicated to celebrating the craft and creativity of the design community, are delighted to announce the five recipients of the inaugural #BlackDesignVisionaries grant program. Presented in partnership with the Brooklyn Museum, #BlackDesignVisionaries aims to center and invest in rising Black designers and Black-led design businesses who offer experimental expressions of Black culture and have a powerful vision for the future.

@design has also created an additional \$75,000 Impact Grant, in recognition of the exceptional talent of the shortlisted designers and businesses. In total, \$205,000 has been awarded to the following #BlackDesignVisionaries recipients:

- Fashion design house [Head of State](#) has been awarded the \$100,000 Visionary Small Business Grant
- Graphic design studio [Morcos Key](#) has been awarded the \$75,000 Impact Grant
- Spatial designer [Dominique Petit-Frère](#), type designer [Tré Seals](#), and designer and art director [Sablā Stays](#) have each been awarded a \$10,000 Aspiring Designer Grant

In addition to the grant money, each recipient will be connected with a team of mentors selected by the grant committee and the program's esteemed partners, Chicago Mobile Makers, Inneract Project, and the Hidden Genius Project.

The grant recipients were chosen from more than five hundred applicants by a prestigious committee led by writer and curator **Antwaun Sargent** and including **Ruth E. Carter**, **Justina Blakeney**, **Toni L. Griffin**, **Sarah Elizabeth Lewis**, **Rick Lowe**, **Bobby C. Martin Jr**, **Heron Preston**, **Ian Spalter**, and **Asad Syrkett**.

Antwaun Sargent, grant committee lead, said, "I'm overwhelmed by the quality of submissions and the ways in which these designers are thinking about the world. A grant like this could mean limitless possibilities, providing an opportunity to those who do not have access to traditional pathways into spaces such as art and design. We all live in this world; we all have to navigate this world. When we have those different perspectives, we all benefit."

Caroline Washington, project lead for the Brooklyn Museum, said, "The Black Design Visionaries project has made me so hopeful about the future. Black designers have been doing the visionary work of shaping the future for so long, and this project both honors and expands the possibilities around this exciting work. I'm so grateful to have witnessed so much incredible Black design talent and played a role in shaping a more equitable future for design."

The Grant Recipients

Visionary Small Business Grant:

Head of State ([@headofstate](#))
Fashion design house



Multidisciplinary artist and designer Taofeek Abijako founded Head of State in 2016, at the age of 17. Three years later, he became the youngest designer to show at New York Fashion Week (men’s) and debuted his first womenswear collection, “Homecoming,” in September 2021. Inspired by Abijako’s Nigerian roots, HOS represents postcolonial youth culture today—a diverse space impacted by Western influences. HOS donates a portion of its proceeds to initiatives that help to build more sustainable futures for underserved communities.

The grant committee was impressed by Abijako’s innovative use of fashion as a platform to express complex social and political commentary while engaging and encouraging young audiences. They praised the

brand’s strong point of view, which combines compelling design, exciting viral experiences, and a unique perspective on representation with sustainability and community-centered work.

Photo: Elias Williams; digital art: Temi Coker

Impact Grant:

Morcos Key ([@morcoskey](#))
Graphic design studio



Morcos Key, a graphic design studio founded by Jon Key and Wael Morcos, collaborates with arts and cultural institutions, nonprofits, and commercial enterprises. The studio prioritizes advocating for underrepresented groups, creating visual systems that present complex historical narratives with contemporary urgency. They have worked with organizations including the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum of Modern Art; Nike; and Sharjah Triennial; as well as publications such as the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, and *New York Times*.

The Impact Grant was established to recognize Morcos Key, shining a light on the significance and breadth of the studio’s work, which spans interactive, digital, and print publishing spaces as well as fine art and illustration. The committee commended their innovation and commitment to driving change within a challenging design space that has offered limited visibility and opportunities for Black designers.

Photo: Elias Williams; digital art: Temi Coker

Aspiring Designer Grant:

Dominique Petit-Frère ([@limboaccra](#))
Spatial designer



Dominique Petit-Frère is the founder and vision director of Limbo Accra, a collaborative spatial design studio dedicated to architectural projects, art installations, and urban design. Petit-Frère imagines a future that is young, inclusive, and regenerative, using urban design as a form of spatial justice that can bridge the gaps between communities and create socioeconomic change. At a time when many African cities are experiencing rapid urbanization, Limbo Accra explores the significance of abandoned, incomplete concrete buildings, revitalizing and repurposing these sites. Limbo Accra was recently appointed architectural lead for Ghana's first-ever recreational skate park, which will be their first built project.

Photo: Carlos Idun-Tawiah; digital art: Temi Coker

Aspiring Designer Grant:

Tré Seals ([@vocaltype.co](#))
Type designer



Tré Seals founded Vocal Type, a diversity-driven type foundry, to confront the lack of diversity in the graphic design industry. Each typeface Seals develops is designed to highlight a historical moment—from the women's suffrage movement in Argentina to the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. Since 2016, Seals's fonts have traveled around the world in the form of street murals, protest signs, voting materials, and brand campaigns.

Photo: Jared Soares; digital art: Temi Coker

Aspiring Designer Grant:

Sablā Stays ([@callmesabla](#))
Designer and art director



Sablā Stays is a multidisciplinary designer and art director whose practice seeks to channel the multidimensionality of the Black collective experience through image and design. She aims to showcase people and subjects that live within the shadow of mainstream culture, using storytelling and design as a tool to educate and challenge narrow perspectives.

Photo: Elias Williams; digital art: Temi Coker

Notes to Editors

Access the full press kit and high-res images [here](#).

For more information, please visit <https://www.instagram.com/design/>

Instagram's @design

Instagram's @design celebrates the craft and creativity of the global design community. At the heart of Instagram's approach to design are two beliefs: everyone is worthy of great design, and design has the power to change the world. We seek to uplift designers who share those values.

Brooklyn Museum @brooklynmuseum

The Brooklyn Museum contains one of the most comprehensive and wide-ranging collections in the United States, enhanced by a distinguished record of exhibitions, scholarship, and service to the public. Its ast holdings span 5,000 years of human creativity from cultures around the world. The Brooklyn Museum is both a leading cultural institution and a community museum dedicated to serving a broad audience. Located in the heart of Brooklyn, the Museum welcomes and celebrates the diversity of its home borough and city. <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org>

About the Partners

The Hidden Genius Project @hiddengeniuspro

The Hidden Genius Project was founded in 2012 by five Black male entrepreneurs and technologists who were unnerved by the dramatic juxtaposition between the high unemployment of Black male youth and the plethora of career opportunities within the local technology sector. We offer training and mentorship for Black male youth in technology creation, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills to transform their lives and communities. Through our student-centered, project-based approach, we invest in young Black men, give them access to technology training, and plug them into an ecosystem of innovation and empowerment. <http://www.thehiddengeniusproject.org/>

Chicago Mobile Makers @chicagomobilemakers

Chicago Mobile Makers creates the next generation of architects and designers of equitable communities, offering free workshops to teach youth in marginalized Chicago communities the design-thinking, architecture, digital fabrication, and placemaking skills needed to make positive change. We bring design and architecture education to communities where it's needed most, counteracting decades of disinvestment and creating the leaders of tomorrow. Our vision is for these youth to become the new leaders in their communities, organizing with each other, eager to exercise their civic voices, and equipped with design-thinking skills to make positive change. Equitable communities are built by and for all. <https://www.chicagomobilemakers.org/>

Inneract Project @inneractproject

Since 2004, Inneract Project (IP) has provided free design classes and initiatives that introduce students to the field of design in hopes of channeling their creativity into exciting new career paths. We partner with design professionals, schools, and tech companies to ensure that students gain hands-on learning that centers design, collaboration, and critical thinking. We foster a supportive environment for students and designers alike to build lasting relationships that follow them throughout their careers. Most importantly, we are committed to reshaping the design and tech industries so that

more Black, Latinx, and underrepresented folks of color are present, empowered, and supported in creating pathways for those who come next. <https://inneractproject.org/>

About the Grant Committee

Antwaun Sargent [@sirsargent](#)

Antwaun Sargent is a writer, editor, and curator living in New York City. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, and other publications; in May 2021, he guest-edited the "New Talent" issue of *Art in America*. Sargent, a director at Gagosian Gallery, New York, is the author of *The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion* (Aperture) and editor of *Young, Gifted and Black: A New Generation of Artists* (DAP).

Ian Spalter [@ianspalter](#)

As the head of Instagram Japan, Ian Spalter leads Instagram's first product development team outside the United States and is focused on strengthening the platform's services and functions. Spalter previously served as Instagram's head of design for more than four years, managing the team responsible for all things design, ranging from cross-platform app experiences to brand and identity. Prior to Instagram, Spalter was a senior UX manager at YouTube, and director of UX and design at Foursquare. Spalter also spent four years at R/GA, where he oversaw design development projects such as the Nike+ Fuelband and Nike Running, Basketball and Training products. Spalter was born and raised in New Rochelle, New York, and graduated from Hampshire College.

Justina Blakeney [@justinablakeney](#)

Justina Blakeney is a designer, artist, and *New York Times* best-selling author of *The New Bohemians* and *The New Bohemians Handbook*. Her latest book, *Jungalow: Decorate Wild*, is available now. With a passion for color, pattern, and plants, Blakeney and her award-winning design blog and shop, Jungalow, have quickly become the go-to sources for bohemian design inspiration. For Blakeney, decorating is about feeling free, having fun, and getting a little wild! She has more than three million followers online and has been named a top designer to follow on Instagram by *Harper's BAZAAR*, *New York Magazine*, and *Lonny* magazine. Blakeney's eponymous lifestyle brand, Justina Blakeney, includes a wide range of lifestyle and home products, including furniture, rugs, pillows, wallpaper, bedding, and stationery, available at Jungalow.com and at retailers worldwide. Blakeney lives in Los Angeles with her husband Jason, daughter Ida, kitty Cous Cous, and fifty-two houseplants.

Ruth E. Carter [@therealruthecarter](#)

Ruth E. Carter is the 2019 Academy Award winner in Costume Design for Marvel's *Black Panther*, making history as the first African American to win in the category. Carter wows audiences and dazzles critics alike with Afro Future looks that empower the female form and turn a superhero into an African king. Inspired by African tribal wear, Carter fuses traditional and contemporary while incorporating technology to deliver fashion and function, creating authenticity and ownership for the actors, characters, and viewers and cementing her as one of the preeminent voices and experts on Afro aesthetics. With a career spanning more than three decades in theater, cinema, and television, Carter has a depth of artistry flowing with creative instincts, passion for culture and history, empathy for people, capacity for research, eye for detail, and ability to deliver the director's vision while infusing it with her signature, making her one of the most sought-after and renowned costume designers in the world.

Toni L. Griffin [@tonilgriffin](#)

Toni L. Griffin is founder of the New York firm urbanAC, which specializes in leading complex, trans-disciplinary planning and urban design projects for multisector clients in cities with long histories of spatial and social injustice. Griffin is also a professor in Practice of Urban Planning, Harvard Graduate School of Design, and leads the Just City Lab, a research platform for developing values-based planning methodologies and tools, including the 2017 Just City Index and a framework of indicators and metrics for evaluating social justice in public space. She began her career as an architect with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP, Chicago, where she became an associate partner. She has also held several public sector positions in Newark, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. Griffin has published several articles and book chapters on the just city, legacy cities, and urban planning and design, and her work has been featured in publications include the *New York Times*, *Metropolis*, and *Next City*. She has lectured extensively in the United States, Europe, South Africa, and South America, including a 2015 TED talk on Detroit. In 2016, President Barack Obama appointed Griffin to the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.

Sarah Elizabeth Lewis [@sarahelizabethlewis1](#)

Sarah Elizabeth Lewis is an associate professor at Harvard University in the department of history of art and architecture and the department of African and African American studies. Her research focuses on the intersection of African American and Black Atlantic visual representation, racial justice, and representational democracy in the United States from the nineteenth century through the present. Lewis's award-winning "Vision & Justice" issue of *Aperture* magazine received the 2017 Infinity Award for Critical Writing and Research and launched the larger Vision and Justice Project. She is the author of *The Rise* (Simon & Schuster, 2014) and editor, with Christine Garnier, of an anthology on the work of Carrie Mae Weems (MIT Press, 2021). Her forthcoming publications include *Caucasian War: How Race Changed Sight in America* (Harvard University Press, 2022), *The Vision and Justice Project* (One World/Random House), and a project on the "groundwork" of contemporary arts in the context of stand-your-ground laws. In 2019, Lewis became the inaugural recipient of the Freedom Scholar Award, presented by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History to honor her for her body of work and its "direct positive impact on the life of African-Americans."

Rick Lowe [@rickloweofficial](#)

Rick Lowe is a Houston-based artist and professor of art at the University of Houston. He has exhibited and worked with communities nationally and internationally. His work has appeared in institutions and exhibitions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Kwangju Biennale, Kwangju, Korea; and Venice Architecture Biennale. He is best known for Project Row Houses, the community-based art project he started in Houston in 1993. Additional community projects include the Watts House Project in Los Angeles; the Borough Project in Charleston, South Carolina; Anyang Public Art Program 2010 in Anyang, Korea; Trans.lation: Vickery Meadow in Dallas, Texas; and Victoria Square Project in Athens, Greece. Among Lowe's honors are the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, the AIA Keystone Award, and a U.S. Artists Booth Fellowship. He has served as a Loeb Fellow at Harvard University, Mel King Fellow at MIT, Auburn University Breedan Scholar, and Stanford University Haas Center Distinguished Visitor. President Barack Obama appointed Lowe to the National Council on the Arts in 2013; in 2014 he was named a MacArthur Fellow. In summer 2021, Lowe worked in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on the Greenwood Art Project, and in Chicago on the Black Wall Street Journey.

Bobby C. Martin Jr. [@bobbycmartin](#)

Bobby C. Martin Jr. sets the relentless standard of design and vision for Champions Design, the agency he founded in 2010 with Jennifer Kinon. He has partnered with many clients that include Amazon, Apple, Girl Scouts, MTV, the National Basketball Association, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and Studio Museum in Harlem. Martin recently illustrated his first children's book, *Have I Ever Told You Black Lives Matter* (Tilbury House). In 2020, he was featured in *Eye* magazine's iconic one hundredth issue. He has lectured globally about brand identity, sat on numerous awards juries, and appeared as a special guest on *Design Matters*, *Design Observer*, and NPR's *Studio 360*. Martin served as a board member of AIGA/NY from 2006 to 2008, and most recently, sat on the Type Directors Club board of directors. Fast Company named Martin one of the [Most Creative People in Business](#) (2017) and named Champions Design one of the 30 Most Important Companies in Design (2019). Martin has received numerous awards, from institutions including AIGA and the Art Directors Club. He is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University and earned an M.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts, where he serves on the faculty.

Heron Preston [@heronpreston](#)

Heron Preston is an artist, creative director, content creator, clothing designer, and DJ who debuted his namesake label at Paris Fashion Week in 2017. In 2021, for his historic first collection with Calvin Klein, Heron introduced staples such as denim, underwear, and white shirts in a campaign featuring Nas, Ashley Graham, and Lil Uzi Vert. Earlier in his career, during a trip to the Mediterranean, Preston saw first-hand the effects of pollution and subsequently became an advocate for sustainability and better environmental manufacturing practices. Heron then collaborated with the NYC Department of Sanitation on a collection of zero-waste clothing and accessories, which sold out immediately following its launch in 2016. Preston has also collaborated with brands including Gap and Nike. Born in San Francisco, he moved to New York in 2004 to earn a B.B.A. from Parsons School of Design.

Asad Syrkett [@as4d](#)

Asad Syrkett is the new editor-in-chief of *ELLE Decor*. Previously, he was deputy editor at *Curbed*, where he oversaw the design website's senior staff and special projects. A former editor at *Architectural Digest* and *Architectural Record* magazines, Syrkett has guest-lectured at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, served as a juror for the National Magazine Awards from the American Society of Magazine Editors, and appeared on panels at Design Miami and South by Southwest, among others. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

About the @design Team**Kristen Joy Watts [@kijw](#)**

Kristen Joy Watts is a creative director at Instagram, where she has led global launches and equity initiatives including #BlackDesignVisionaries, #DesignForAll and #RunwayForAll. During her time at Instagram, she has focused on emerging artists and designers, leading the art and fashion editorial coverage on @instagram while helping the team build the largest social media account in the world. In launching @design, she has developed and expanded upon the core belief that everyone is worthy of great design. Watts also leads in-app Instagram artwork designed to uplift communities and mark cultural moments, such as Pride and Women's History Month. Before she joined Instagram, Watts was an associate creative director at R/GA. She began her career at the *New York Times*, where she was part of the small team that launched *Lens*, a

groundbreaking photography and photojournalism blog. Watts is a proud member of the disability community, consulting and volunteering for numerous organizations dedicated to serving it. Among these is Summertime Gallery, a gallery and workspace for artists with intellectual disabilities in Brooklyn.

Frances Smith [@francesmarina](#)

Frances Smith is an Afro-Latinx multidisciplinary creative based in New York City with a background in art direction and creative strategy. Her bold use of color and design aims to tell stories, amplify social justice issues, and highlight underrepresented communities. At Instagram, Smith leads design for social impact and partnership campaigns.

Toni Coleman [@yeahthats_her](#)

Toni Coleman is an experiential graphic designer from Louisville, Kentucky, currently based in sunny San Diego. She is an experienced creative helping companies craft brand stories at the intersection of tech and built environments. Her passion for amplifying voices continues in her community work aimed at finding and building space for other Black creatives