



## ARTISTS AND CREATIVE LEADERS JOIN FORCES TO CHANNEL THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF ART TO INSPIRE HUMAN UNITY

On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, Women Forward International will host its inaugural convening of the WFI Arts Counsel to build a community of artistic visionaries who leverage the power of art to bring about positive changes in global consciousness and behavior.

### MEDIA ADVISORY FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*Women Forward International presents the Arts Counsel, a global network of artists, activists, scholars and practitioners dedicated to bridging the arts with modern day international relations issues to break free of outmoded ways of thinking and find solutions based on love and human unity.*

Washington, D.C. (April 2021) – Art, when inspired with love, can awaken. Art can form a bridge between our hearts and minds, allowing us to rise above our differences, and transcend barriers to human unity and progress. As the world faces continual challenges to our health and wellbeing, our safety and security, our environment, and our cultural, social and civil rights, we turn to artists to dare to speak the unspeakable, make us conscious of the root causes of our challenges, and rally the human spirit.

The Arts Counsel is designed to be a creative hub, a place where members will develop their practice and curate innovative events that reflect on and respond to Women Forward International's programming, which partners graduate students with organizations on action-oriented research projects to advance women. They will encourage our next generation of leaders to move beyond the limited framework of institutional solutions to the world's most intractable problems and make global unity, collaboration, and service a living reality

## The Participants



**Jenevieve Aken** is a Nigerian photographer and story-teller who focuses on social documentary photography and often adopts self-portraiture in her artistic practice. She explores personal experiences and contemporary social issues of identity, sexuality, gender and social roles. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries across Africa, Europe, Asia and America.

Ms. Aken has participated in many international, group exhibitions most recently in the Hundred Heroines “Cabinet Of Remedies” in London, and the Hidden\_Project/Hidden\_Message in Düsseldorf, Germany. In 2020, Ms. Aken was awarded the Wellcome Photography Prize in the Hidden Worlds category for her 2017 project *Monankim*, that explores female circumcision.

Ms. Aken has undertaken artist residency programs with LagosPhoto Festival in conjunction with Neue Schule fur Fotografie in Berlin, Germany, a residency at the Villa Lena foundation in Tuscany, Italy, and a residency at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul, South Korea.

Ms. Aken lives and works in Lagos, Nigeria.



**Dana Al Fardan** is a Qatari contemporary composer, songwriter and symphonic artist. Drawing on her rich cultural heritage and influenced by her love of world music, her work is a blend of Arabic influenced contemporary classical, epic in scale and universally accessible.

Ms. Al Fardan is the brand ambassador of the internationally renowned Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO), with whom she recorded “Layla” and “Sandstorm”, her first two albums. Later on, she played alongside the London Metropolitan Orchestra at the iconic Theatre Royal Haymarket in London, debuting with a full program of her repertoire and bringing Qatari music to a UK audience.

Ms. Al Fardan has delved into musical theatre, composing the music for “Broken Wings”, the first Middle East musical that arrived to the West End and performed in various theatres around the globe.

Currently, she's working on a composition for a film score Orca, a drama based on a true story; her second musical, "Rumi" based on the story of the 13th century philosopher and poet Rumi, to be debuted in the West End in 2021 and her fourth album "INDIGO" which will be released in the second quarter 2021.



**Fatima Al Dosari** is the Executive Director of Qatar America Institute for Culture (QAIC). She is an art and culture leader who spearheads the Institute's pursuits to further strengthen cultural understanding, dialogue, and appreciation between her home country, Qatar, and the United States.

Ms. Al Dosari leverages her 10+ years of experience in cultural exchange and management to grow the organization's sustainable efforts in supporting a diverse art and culture community that drives inspiring change for the future. Her previous work experience includes strategizing and managing various digital properties for international organizations in the media industry and UN agencies. She also consulted for several governmental organizations, academic institutions, and corporations both in Qatar and the U.S. focusing on strategic communication, data analysis, and policy.

Ms. Al Dosari was awarded an M.A. from Georgetown University's Communication, Culture and Technology (CCT) Program and received an executive postgraduate degree in Arts & Culture Strategy from University of Pennsylvania. Her B.A. was in International Affairs and Human Development from Qatar University.



**Vera André** is a plastic artist who comes from the design discipline. Since 1994 she has dedicated her life to painting, sculpture, and engraving. Ms. André has held exhibitions nationally and internationally, presenting her work at the Mexican Embassy in Colombia, the Cultural Center of Mexico in Miami, the Ollin Yoliztli Cultural Center, the Art Museum INBA, Casa Lamm, among others.

Passionate about life and its mystical origin, Vera's work is a mapping and immersion of the micro and macro cosmos. A journey through the unconscious of being, her work is a primary way to process and abound the human experience in space as a whole – where we are all united – where we are the universe.

Ms. André lives and works in Mexico.



**Neyla Arnas** is a Washington DC-based artist, working primarily in acrylics, watercolors, and mixed media on paper, as well as in photography. She has been painting since 2003 and is a juried member of the Potomac Valley Watercolorists. Ms Arnas has shown her paintings and photography in juried exhibitions in Washington DC, Virginia, Maryland, and Washington State, including exhibits at the Cosmos Club, Strathmore Hall, Alexandria Art League, Alexandria City Hall, 39th Street Gallery, Brookside Gardens, Greenspring Gardens, Athenaeum, Target Gallery, and Northwinds Arts Center.

Ms. Arnas is recently retired from the National Defense University where she served as Director for Women, Peace and Security Initiatives and as an instructor of American Studies for international fellows. Before working at the Department of Defense, Ms. Arnas held senior staff positions at the Department of State and United States Senate, and began her 30+ year career in federal service with the Government Accountability Office.

Ms. Arnas holds an MA in Political Science from Louisiana State University. She is fluent in Turkish, French and Italian.



**Mehera Blum** is the founder and creative director of Blumera, created with the intent of designing luxuriously exquisite, high-vibratory, uplifting collections while utilizing unexpected natural sustainable materials such as recycled brass and up-cycled wood. Ms. Blum is heavily influenced by her extensive travels that introduced her to a myriad of cultures and the beauty of the world, which she continually seeks to express in new and unimagined ways. She is also inspired by her late mother, world-renowned painter Laurie Blum, and in the years since her mother's passing has reimagined her mother's paintings into new creations.

Ms. Blum started her career as an actress with a BFA from Boston University, studying also at London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. She went on to appear in theater, movies, and television.

Blumera has been featured in publications including British Vogue, Vogue India, WWD, Forbes and Harper's Bazaar.



**Kay Chernush** is an award-winning photographer with more than 30 year's experience in commercial and fine art photography. Her assignments have taken her all over the world for major magazines, Fortune 500 corporations, and both nonprofit and governmental agencies. Her fine art work is included in the permanent collections of the World Bank, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the National Institutes of Health.

In 2005, an assignment for the U.S. State Department brought her face to face with the evils of human trafficking and modern slavery which led her to begin working with individual survivors and anti-trafficking organizations in cities around the world. She developed an innovative approach, using collaged and constructed imagery that dignifies trafficked persons and re-frames how their stories are portrayed. To broaden the scope of her project, Ms. Chernush founded ArtWorks for Freedom in July 2011, to use the power of art in all its forms to fight modern slavery.

Ms. Chernush lives in the Washington, DC area.



**Jacqueline Farrell** is the Education Director at The Prince's Foundation and is based at the charity headquarters at Dumfries House in Scotland. Her remit is driven by the vision of the charity president HRH The Prince of Wales, of creating communities for a more sustainable world. Her role involves overseeing education and training in multiple curriculum areas from field to fork linked to sustainable food systems through to STEM based learning focusing on real world challenges as well as the physical and mental wellbeing benefits that come from learning from and spending time in nature. Her involvement with The Prince's Foundation came through her long career in arts education and practice.

She was instrumental in the founding and development of The Prince's Foundation's now renowned Future Textiles programme which has an international reach. The programme supports new entrants into the fashion and textile industry through a range of activity focusing on both traditional and essential technical and craft skills to help build a thriving and sustainable textile industry. Most recently, the project delivered a unique programme known as The Modern Artisan in partnership with Yoox Net-a-Porter, teaching valuable hand craft manufacturing techniques for a luxury garment



collection that was inspired by the work of Leonardo Da Vinci and combined data science research to produce a sustainable capsule collection.

A graduate of the renowned Glasgow School of Art, Jacqueline worked in the fashion and textile industry prior to setting up her own small label specialising in embroidered fashion accessories. She was the author of three international craft books before moving full time into fashion and art education. She continues to create collage-based artworks combining watercolours, collage and stitch using nature-based themes and is currently working on a project to produce 26 mini artworks for a charity she supports. Previously she undertook classes in Creative Writing at the University of Strathclyde to allow her to explore other creative mediums.



**Zuhail Feraidon** was born in Afghanistan and later fled to Turkmenistan with her family before immigrating to the United States in 2005. Ms. Feraidon received her BA in Studio Art and Biology from the University of Virginia and her MFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design.

In 2015 Ms. Feraidon traveled back to Afghanistan, as part of an independent study, with research focused on female identity in one of the most difficult environments that women have to endure. In 2016 she was the recipient of the Aunspaugh Post-Baccalaureate Fellowship in Studio Art through the McIntire Department of Art.

Ms. Feraidon currently teaches as a visiting lecturer at The Massachusetts College of Art and Design and as an instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design.



**Maria Helena Maldonado-Villar** was born in Barranquilla, Colombia. Her art stems from her life-long passion for travel and photography. She translates her photographs into a variety of artistic mediums: wood sculpture, intaglio, woodcut, silk screen, and linoleum. Some of her work is printed on her handmade paper from Fabriano, Italy, where she studied at the Museo de la Carta e della Filigrana, focusing on paper making, and intaglio with Roberto Stellutin, during her the summer of 2015.

Ms. Maldonado-Villar's work has been exhibited in Curated Exhibitions and venues, including Gallery Via Umbria, Somerset Town Hall, Cosmos Club, and the World Bank.

Additionally, her artwork has decorated the showroom at Poltrona Frau in Georgetown, Washington, DC, from October 2016-August 2017.

Ms. Maldonado-Villar has an MA in International Relations and Economics from Johns Hopkins University (SAIS) and a BA in International Studies from The American University. She has also worked at The World Bank in Washington and UNESCO in Paris.

Ms. Maldonado-Villar lives in Washington, DC.



**Georgina Mayer** has been a macrobiotic chef and counselor at Casa Macro since 2013.

She enjoys sharing her passion for the culinary arts for health and healing with the mission to inspire and promote wellness and satisfaction through food and lifestyle.

Casa Macro is the first vegan macrobiotic restaurant in Mexico. It offers a 100% plant based menu in an environmentally friendly space where one can enjoy healthy meals next to a small organic garden. At Casa Macro Ms. Mayer also offers lectures, nutritional and macrobiotic counseling, cooking classes, organic garden workshops. People interested in learning about healthy foods, lifestyle and how to take care of their own health consciously through peaceful coexistence with our planet will get the skills and resources in a fun environment.

Ms. Mayer is the co-owner and co-founder of Cauce. Cauce is dedicated to the promotion of health and environmental issues through lectures, children's plays and counseling for businesses, schools, families and individuals.

Ms. Mayer is a Plant Based Diets Chef by the Natural Epicurean Academy of Culinary Arts in Austin, TX, a Macrobiotics Counselor by Macrobiotics America, Oroville, CA and has a Nutrition diploma by Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana.



**Nada Odeh** is a Syrian artist, curator, activist, humanitarian and poet. She was born and raised in Damascus and lived in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates before coming to the United States in 2013 due to the conflict and revolution in her country. Ms. Odeh received her BA in Fine Arts from Damascus University and her M.A. in Museum Studies from Syracuse University. Ms. Odeh has established a project known as 'Nada's Picassos', which began in Damascus but was then later traveled to Dubai, Michigan and is currently based in New York State. Ms. Odeh's artwork is influenced by elements of her heritage including Arabic miniatures and Middle Eastern colors, and the key themes of her artwork are Syrian refugees in camps and the Syrian people with a recent focus on displaced Syrian women in exile.

Ms. Odeh's art has been exhibited in Damascus, Dubai, Detroit, Toledo, Tiffin, Washington D.C., and across New York State in New York City, Syracuse, Albany and Auburn.

In addition to exhibitions of her work, Ms. Odeh has also curated projects on the topic of immigration and folklore arts. She worked with the New York Folklore on various projects highlighting immigrants and refugees' folklore arts.

Ms. Odeh lives and works in Syracuse, New York.

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