Katie Ka Vang and Theater Mu Announced as Recipients of 2024 Joyce Awards

The $100,000 grant will support the creation and presentation of *Hmong Futures,* a new theater project illuminating the diverse stories of the Hmong diaspora in the Twin Cities



A still from Theater Mu's 2023 production of Katie Ka Vang's musical *Again*,
featuring Pagnia Xiong as Shia (left) and Dexieng Yang as Mai See (right). Photo by Rich Ryan.

Saint Paul, MN, July 30, 2024 – **Katie Ka Vang** and **Theater Mu** today were announced as recipients of the Joyce Foundation's **2024 Joyce Awards**, receiving a landmark grant of $100,000 to support a new commission, including $30,000 allocated for an artist stipend. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the foundation's signature annual grantmaking program that has supported artists of color in the creation of new, community-centered works with organizational partners across the Great Lakes region.

Supported by the $100,000 grant, Hmong American playwright Katie Ka Vang will develop *Hmong Futures,* a new theater project illuminating the diverse stories of the Hmong diaspora in Minneapolis-Saint Paul, reflecting on the 50th anniversary of Hmong and Southeast Asian resettlement in the United States in 2025. Commissioned by Theater Mu, the largest Asian American theater company in the Midwest, the project will be developed through deep engagement with Hmong community members, including interviews, story circles, workshop readings, family-style dinners, and facilitated conversations. One of the topics of exploration will include agriculture in Hmong life (including Vang's own experience with her mother as a farmer) and its role as a way of practicing culture. Vang's project aims to spotlight the experiences of the Hmong community in the Twin Cities—home to the largest Hmong American population in the United States in a major metropolitan area—while providing a forum for Hmong people to imagine a collective future of well-being and abundance, beyond survival.

“Through grassroots work and working in the nonprofit cultural arts sector, I saw the power of art as a way to navigate systems, and use storytelling to shift narratives and shape a new reality,” said **Vang**. “I write in hopes of transformation for me and my Hmong American and Asian American people, and do this by summoning up courage to look at the things we do to ourselves and each other so we can change. As a first-generation Hmong American, my worldview was largely shaped by my refugee parents' lived experiences related to political persecution, traumatic experiences, displacement, and poverty, and I hope my work is a vessel for myself and my community to co-create ideas that point toward liberation and transformation.”

With the expansion of each grant from $75,000 to $100,000, 2024 marks the program’s largest total amount awarded to date, with $500,000 in grants to support five community-centered artistic projects. The 2024 awardees deeply engage Great Lakes communities through co-creation and collaboration across disciplines including theater, music, and sculpture, to explore diverse cultures, identities, and experiences; invigorate public spaces; and foster healing and connection for a more equitable future. **The other 2024 awardees are: Andrea Assaf with the Arab American National Museum (Dearborn, MI); Marcus Elliot with the Detroit Parks Coalition (Detroit, MI); Terry Guest with Chicago Children’s Theatre (Chicago, IL); and Edra Soto with The Sculpture Center (Cleveland, OH).**

“The 2024 awardees join an outstanding group of artists and leaders who have built a legacy of transformative art across Great Lakes communities,” said **Joyce Foundation President and CEO Ellen Alberding.** “As we mark two decades of the Joyce Awards, we want to celebrate the artists and communities who have enriched the Great Lakes region, and those who will build on this work in the years to come.”

“This year’s Joyce Awards artists and organizations are responding to some of the most urgent issues facing our region and beyond. From addressing the impacts of incarceration and war to invigorating and expanding access to public spaces and highlighting the diversity of immigrant experiences and cultural identities, these transformative projects will promote healing and community connections while inspiring social change,” said **Mia Khimm**, **Joyce Foundation Culture Program Director**. “We’re proud to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Awards by celebrating the work of artists, organizations, and communities that are helping us to imagine and build a more equitable and vibrant future for the Great Lakes region.”

Since its establishment in 2004, the Joyce Awards has had a significant impact on artists and communities across the Great Lakes region. Over the past 20 years, the program has invested nearly $5 million for the creation of 87 new works of visual, performing, and multidisciplinary art. These commissions have engaged Great Lakes communities and amplified the careers of artists of color locally, regionally, and nationwide. The Joyce Awards has supported artists pursuing sustained collaboration with non-profit organizations and communities in and around six Great Lakes cities—Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis-Saint Paul—for as long as 24 months, resulting in the production of site-specific and process-driven art works shaped by community input and engagement. The impact of the award extends beyond the grant period, expanding new community-focused programs and capacities for organizations and creating opportunities for artists to deepen and expand their practices.

For 20 years, the Joyce Awards have been catalytic in advancing the careers of honorees, inspiring future work and opening the door to recognition at the highest national and international levels. Past

recipients include Terence Blanchard, Sanford Biggers, Camille A. Brown, Nick Cave, Sandra Delgado, Larissa FastHorse, Theaster Gates, Rhiannon Giddens, Quiara Alegría Hudes, Bill T. Jones, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Pope.L, Julie Mehretu, Jessie Montgomery, Lynn Nottage, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, Rosy Simas, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. The 2023 recipients were Regina Agu with the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago; Sonny Mehta with Mandala South Asian Performing Arts; Marisa Morán Jahn with the National Public Housing Museum; Marlena Myles with Franconia Sculpture Park; and Julie Tolentino with SPACES.

To learn more about the 20th anniversary of the Joyce Awards and the 2024 awardees, please visit joycefdn.org/joyce-awards.

About Katie Ka Vang
Katie Ka Vang (she/they) is a Hmong American playwright and storyteller. Her work explores the complexity of cultures & communities, diaspora, dis-ease, and transformation. Her work includes *Again* the musical, *Fertile Grounds*, *WTF*, *Hmong Bollywood*, *5:1 Meaning of Freedom; 6:2 Use of Sharpening*, *Fast FWD Motions*, *In Quarantine*, *FINAL ROUND*, and *Spirit Trust*. Her work has been developed and presented at East West Players, Mixed Blood Theatre, Red Eye Theater, Pangea World Theater, Pillsbury House Theatre, Theater Mu, Leviathan Lab, Bushwick Starr, Brown University, the Royal Court Theatre, the Walker Art Center, Civic Ensemble, Out North Art House, and more. She is currently a 23/24 Constellation Fellow at the Center for Cultural Power working with Indigenous Roots, and she is part of the 2023/24 Jungle Theater Artist Cohort. She received the 22/23 McKnight and 19/20 Many Voices fellowship at the Playwrights' Center. She has also received support from Jerome Foundation, NET, Knight Foundation, NPN, MRAC, MSAB, and Coalition of Asian American Leaders. She was a member of East West Players 21-23 Playwright's Group. Katie holds an MFA in playwriting from Brown University. Visit katiekavang.com for more information.

About Theater Mu
Theater Mu (pronounced MOO) is one of the largest Asian American theater companies in the nation and the largest in the Midwest. Founded in 1992, Mu tells stories from the heart of the Asian American experience, presenting a fusion of traditional and contemporary artistic influences, which range from classics to up-and-coming voices in our community. Theater Mu's continuing goal to celebrate and empower the Asian American community through theater is achieved through mainstage productions, emerging artist support, and educational outreach programs. Theater Mu is a member of the Consortium of Asian American Theaters & Artists, as well as a member of the Twin Cities Theatres of Color Coalition, proudly standing alongside New Native Theatre, Pangea World Theater, Penumbra Theatre, and Teatro Del Pueblo. Visit theatermu.org for more information.

About the Joyce Foundation
The Joyce Foundation is a private, nonpartisan foundation based in Chicago that invests in public policies and strategies to advance racial equity and economic mobility for the next generation in the Great Lakes region. Joyce supports research, development, and advocacy in six program areas: Culture, Democracy, Education & Economic Mobility, Environment, Gun Violence Prevention & Justice Reform, and Journalism. For more information about the Joyce Foundation, please visit www.joycefdn.org.

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