

GUILD HALL: OFFSITE

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Guild Hall, in Partnership with Artists Wunetu Wequai Tarrant and Christian Scheider and the Padoquohan Medicine Lodge, Receives Creatives Rebuild New York Grant

The nearly \$400,000 grant will support two years of funding for the artists, whose [First Literature Project](#) uses cutting-edge 3D, VR, and holographic technology to preserve, recover, and advance Native American oral traditions.

With its collaborators, Guild Hall is one of just two East End non-profit recipients of the highly competitive grant.



Wunetu Wequai Tarrant, Photo: Kaylene Big Knife; Christian Scheider, Photo: First Literature Project

September 29, 2022—East Hampton, NY—Guild Hall, artists Wunetu Wequai Tarrant, and [Christian Scheider](#), and the Padoquohan Medicine Lodge announced that they have received an Artist Employment Program (AEP) grant from **Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY). Designed to support employment opportunities for artists,**

the program is funding 98 collaborations involving a dynamic group of 300 artists employed by community-based organizations, municipalities, and tribal governments across New York State. CRNY has awarded a total of \$49.9 million in funding to support artists' salaries and benefits, with an additional \$11.7 million in funding provided to the organizations holding employment. **Guild Hall will receive \$407,800 to disperse in support of the collaboration with the artists and the Padoquohan Medicine Lodge, including artists' salaries and benefits for two years.**

Wunetu Wequai Tarrant and Christian Scheider will work with Guild Hall for the next two years, from summer 2022 through 2024, as Guild Hall Community Artists-in-Residence. During this time, they will further develop the ongoing work of the [First Literature Project](#) which utilizes immersive 3D, VR, and holographic technology to achieve the simplest, oldest thing: sitting across from someone as they tell you a story. This new archive will situate Orators in a virtual environment, offering Native nations, tribes and peoples a novel way to author and re-author their ancient oral traditions for the modern age.

Wunetu Wequai Tarrant states, "The First Literature Project is centered on creating a new platform that offers advanced support for Indigenous peoples to preserve their storytelling traditions, using modern technology to create an immersive experience. The first three short Orations in development come from the Shinnecock culture of Long Island NY and will include an adaptation of *Padawe, A Story of the Whale Hunt*, written by Elizabeth Chee Chee ThunderBird Haile. The story takes place in pre-colonial Shinnecock Territory and will be narrated for the first time in the re-awakening Shinnecock language. With the help of a few dedicated community researchers and academic consultants, this production will be the first of its kind spoken in the Shinnecock language, which has been classified as critically endangered and considered sleeping for the past 100 years. The second Oration brings the Indigenous perspective of the Circassian Shipwreck, 1876, in which 10 Shinnecock men perished off the coast of Mecox Bay. The third Oration in our initial series is a retelling of the life of our ancestor, Stephen Talkhouse, and his travels on land and sea through the mid 1800s."

"The significance of having a platform to share our history cannot be understated," continued Ms. Tarrant. "A wealth of knowledge is left out when the only accounts of Indigenous cultures available are written by outside anthropologists and authors. The First Literature Project's method will bring our stories into the 21st century, using our voices, our faces, and sharing our perspectives."

For the first three Orations, The First Literature Project will work closely with the Shinnecock community through the Padoquohan Medicine Lodge, a nonprofit organization that supports the needs of the Shinnecock people and advocates for the protection of ancestral lands and ancient burial grounds. By sitting with Shinnecock elders and young people, the project will gather what is needed to create artistically rendered immersive experiences, that honor the ancient tradition of in-person storytelling. In addition, the First Literature Project will assist Padoquohan Medicine Lodge in creating a video archive of historical footage and interviews with Shinnecock tribal members, helping to preserve their family histories and honoring their ancestors by acknowledging their lives and the significant contributions they made toward the

preservation of their people, land, and traditions throughout the recent time of genocide and ongoing cultural assimilation. The First Literature Project will document the resilience, dignity, sovereignty, and strength of modern Indigenous people.

“We hope that moving forward, we will be able to provide documentation and production services to other Indigenous and First Nation communities, as there is a dire need for the inclusion of the Indigenous perspective, one which has historically been left out the world over,” said Ms. Tarrant.

“When, in any society, citizens can no longer imagine and articulate what an ideal world should be, we have arrived at a crisis. That articulation, and the capacity for it, has always begun with story,” Mr. Scheider said.

“I come from the traditions of American theater and film — and I believe that’s as close as we have to a ‘national’ oral tradition in America today,” Scheider continued. “But what these modern American forms lack is a sense of continuation from one generation to the next; the taking of stories deep into our own lives, and then passing them down to those who come after us, person to person. I’m not sure that’s how the average person approaches a film or a stage-work when they sit down in the theater. The First Literature Project is by and for Native people, but it is also a platform that points the rest of us toward a different, older way of listening. As much as the platform is a new way of presenting, it is also an opportunity to listen in a new way.”

“As one of my heroes N Scott Momaday reminds us, this must include presence, gesture, look, and, most importantly, it must include silence. I grew up hearing Wunetu’s grandmother, Elizabeth Thunderbird Haile, as she told us her stories in school, Shinnecock stories, but some of them were of her own creation — they became Shinnecock stories right then and there. We would anticipate what might come, we would reflect in the moment as to what had been spoken, and then she would ask us through her look, ‘what might come next?’ That contains the meaning of all storytelling to me — to ask each listener implicitly, ‘What is to come next for you?’ What will be your role in this story? The First Literature Project attempts to recommit to this deep sense of continuity, to authorship and re-authorship as an ongoing act. This is the work that the First Literature Project facilitates, first and by example with Native Nations, and then for all of us. We non-Native folks have a lot to learn.”

Artist Employment Program recipients were selected through a two-stage process by a group of twenty external peer reviewers alongside CRNY staff. From an initial pool of over 2,700 written applications, 167 were shortlisted for interviews with reviewers. To view the list of 98 Artist Employment Program participants, visit <https://www.creativesrebuildny.org/participants/>.

“If we are to truly rebuild our amazing state, we must celebrate artists’ contributions not only to the economy but to what makes us human,” says Creatives Rebuild New York’s Executive Director Sarah Calderon. “The incredible work being funded through CRNY’s Artist Employment Program underscores the importance of direct support for both individual artists and the organizations that hold their employment.”

Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY), a project of the Tides Center, is a three-year, \$125 million investment in the financial stability of New York State artists and the organizations that employ them. Guild Hall's collaboration with Wunetu Wequai Tarrant, Christian Scheider, and The Padoquohan Medicine Lodge, was made possible through support from CRNY's Artist Employment Program.

For more information about Creatives Rebuild New York's Artist Employment Program, please visit creativesrebuildny.org.



ABOUT WUNETU WEQUAI TARRANT

Wunetu Wequai Tarrant is a member of the Shinnecock Indian Nation, located on the East End of Long Island, NY. She grew up with her family on the Shinnecock reservation peninsula. Wunetu has been inspired by her grandmother and matriarch of the ThunderBird clan, Elizabeth 'Chee Chee' ThunderBird Haile, to promote cultural preservation and education. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Alfred University in 2011, attended the NAMA, Masters of Native American Linguistics and Languages 2018-2019, and is currently a Linguistics Ph.D. candidate at the University of Arizona focusing on the reconstruction and revitalization of the Shinnecock dialect of Southern New England Algonquian. Wunetu has worked closely with the Algonquian Language Revitalization Project on designing curriculum and activities for teaching Shinnecock and related dialects and continues to research best practices in language research and production of materials that will be accessible to community members and teachers regardless of linguistic education experience. She has continued to advocate for Indigenous students as the Julia & Bernard Bloch fellow (2019-2022) and special interest groups through the Linguistic Society of America.

ABOUT CHRISTIAN SCHEIDER

Christian Scheider is an independent filmmaker and theatermaker living between NYC and the East End of Long Island. In addition to his original film and theater work, Scheider heads video production for The Sunny Center in Ireland, the world's only post-exoneration residential community, and produces films for the Bard Prison Initiative, his alma mater. As a theatermaker, Scheider co-adapted, produced, and directed Ray Bradbury's short story *The Murderer* and Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Galápagos* into fully staged productions, and premiered with his collaborators an original slapstick comedy *The Summit*. For film, Scheider has produced and directed the documentary *The Sunny Center* about death row exonerees, and co-produced and directed the documentary *The Tree Prophet* about a self-identified climate prophet, which won the Audience Award at the San Francisco Independent Film Festival. Scheider is in

perpetual pre-production on the quixotic feature comedy film *Animal Party* about human-animal rituals all over the world, the original screenplay for which was honored by the Redford Center as part of their 2016 grants program. Scheider is currently writing and producing a limited series, *Pullman*, about the eponymous railroad baron and the epochal national labor uprising of 1894. More at christianscheider.com.

ABOUT THE FIRST LITERATURE PROJECT

The First Literature project aims to support the preservation of indigenous stories, culture, and languages by creating a new, immersive Oration platform which engages the wider public through partnership with tribal organizations and cultural, educational, and arts institutions to facilitate immersive 3D, VR, and holographic experiences.

<https://firstliterature.org/>

ABOUT THE PADOQUOHAN MEDICINE LODGE

Our grandmother, Elizabeth Chee Chee ThunderBird Haile, who was the matriarch of the ThunderBird Clan of Shinnecock, along with her two sisters Edith Gregoire and Grace Valdez Smith, founded the Padoquohan Medicine Lodge, Inc. in 1994 to honor the memory and vision of their parents Chief ThunderBird (Henry Bess) and Mrs. Edith ThunderBird. The non-profit organization primarily focuses on providing assistance for emergent needs, education, and the physical, mental and spiritual maintenance of a strong and healthy Shinnecock community and environment. For more information on upcoming events and initiatives, please visit:

<https://www.padoquohanmedicinelodge.org/>

ABOUT GUILD HALL

Guild Hall is the cultural heart of the East End: a museum, performing arts, and education center, founded in 1931. We invite everyone to experience the endless possibilities of the arts: to open minds to what art can be; inspire creativity and conversation; and have fun.

For more information about this and other programs, visit www.guildhall.org.

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