Farnsworth House, the iconic American masterpiece designed and built by Mies van der Rohe for Dr. Edith Farnsworth in Plano, Illinois is a historic site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The National Trust and United States Artists (USA), the national Chicago-based organization dedicated to supporting accomplished and innovative American artists with significant financial awards, have joined together to create a public program for the Chicago Architecture Biennial. For the program, “Architecture + Art: Inspiration Amplified,” two USA Fellows are creating new works that are inspired by the Farnsworth House and its landscape.

The project demonstrates how the Farnsworth House, an exemplary representation of the International Style of architecture, continues to inspire contemporary artists today. Simultaneously, the project showcases opportunities and impacts of new and innovative arts programming at historic architectural sites.

“Architecture + Art” is part of a broader initiative to pilot the creation of new art works at National Trust historic sites across the country. The National Trust has carefully selected the sites because they are of national significance and are located in close proximity to established communities of artists. These projects will strengthen the connection between these cultural assets and their communities through the creation of new works and associated experiential programming.

The art work produced for the Biennial will be the third in a recent series of commissions undertaken by the Farnsworth House that has included the work of Oswaldo Romberg, supported by a grant from the Graham Foundation, and the artist collective Luftwerk. The artwork will visually, physically, and intellectually engage the audience on different levels. Architecture novices will better grasp fundamental elements of the iconic modern design of Farnsworth House and how those elements continue to impact design today. Design professionals will gain a new understanding and appreciation of the role of the Farnsworth House in art and design today.

Mary Ellen Childs composes concert work, often with a strong visual element, for a variety of instrumental ensembles, including solo accordion, string quartets, and chamber groups. The creator of many multi-media works, Childs is best known for her “visual percussion” pieces for her percussion group CRASH, in which she incorporates the movements of the bodies of the performers. Childs has received commissions from the Kronos Quartet, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Kitchen, and the Walker Art Center, among others.

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle has a varied and complex practice that encompasses mostly sculpture and video. Manglano-Ovalle often collaborates with scientists on projects that make abstractions, such as one’s DNA or a cloud, tangible. These elegant forms often mask political agendas that can include, for example, immigration issues, climate change, or globalization. He has also created a series of sculptures and films based on the modernism of architect Mies van der Rohe. Manglano-Ovalle is a professor in the Department of Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University, Chicago, and won a MacArthur Fellowship in 2001.
The National Trust has a long history of celebrating the arts at its sites, both through our fine and decorative arts collections and by utilizing these unique places as venues for the exhibitions and performing arts and as inspiration for the creation of new works. From Fujiko Nakaya’s celebrated Veil installation at the Glass House to a summer filled with theater at Brucemore to our NEA-supported fiddler-in-residence at the Shadows on the Teche, National Trust Historic Sites continue their rich legacies as places or inspiration and creativity in the arts.

The $20,000 in grant funds from the Graham Foundation will be used to support the production of site-specific art works and associated programming including: honorariums for the artists, studio assistant fees, project coordination fees, equipment rentals, equipment setup, event publication, an opening event, project documentation, and installation/de-installation of the work.

**THIS PROJECT WILL SERVE TO:**

— create artistic synergy between artists, place, and history;

— amplify existing relationships between artistic genres and regional metropolitan Chicago’s identity as a center of art and design;

— re-imagine the interpretation of a significant historic site through the creation of new works of art; develop authentic and compelling branding that highlights Farnsworth’s contribution to contemporary design; and

— pilot a partnership between the National Trust for Historic Preservation and United States Artists that has the potential to expand enormously, impacting historic sites, artists, and communities across the country.

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