

€400k for underfunded artists and organisations with a social vision

The Supporting Act continues 'no strings attached' vision for arts funding with second funding round



Oroko Radio event in collaboration with Boiler Room and Surf Ghana. Photo by Kikelomo Oludemi.

- €400,000 for 16 emerging artists, initiatives and grassroots orgs across Europe
- Funded by 1% revenue pledge from WeTransfer
- Unique trust-based philanthropy approach

From a collective of strippers tackling stigma of sex work through weekly life drawing classes to an artist embracing kitsch aesthetics to ignite a revolution, the 2023 cohort for The Supporting Act Foundation represents an exciting, eclectic mix of individuals and grassroots organisations using art for good.

Now in their second funding round, the work of the foundation comes at a time when alternative thinking about arts funding and philanthropy is flourishing, and sets forth a bold vision for what the future could look like.

But more than arguing for change, the programme is making a tangible impact today. Funding from previous years has enabled the participants to launch mentorship schemes into the music industry, a film library that looks beyond the Western canon, ensured all participating creatives were paid for their work, and propelled artists forward to win awards and secure exhibitions. A previous grantee, the Berlin-based artist Seonah Chae, has described their experience as an “the opportunity of a lifetime.”

Meet the new 2023 grantees

Selected by an independent jury of artists and activists, the 16-strong list brings together painters, theatre directors, DJs, an architectural collective, a radio station and more. Two funding programmes (Creative Bursary offers €10,000 to 10 emerging artists and Impact Grant of €50,000 for 6 arts organisations) pay regular instalments to each grantee – one year for individuals or two years for organisations.

Below we’ve selected some highlights from the list of participants, which is followed by the full list and wider context from the programme.

Highlights from the Impact Grant:

East London Strippers Collective (UK)



Performer at an ELSC life drawing class. Featuring Bronwen Parker-Rhodes, photo by Samantha Sun.

A network of strippers, artists, and performers organising against the stigma of sex work, East London Strippers Collective (ELSC) is a company run entirely by dancers and ex-dancers. From pop-up strip-club parties, to public talks, art exhibitions and life-drawing classes, they are creating better working conditions for their members. The collective also runs a popular stripper life-drawing class which gives artists a unique opportunity to draw performers, turning the age-old tradition of artistic nudes on its head.

Espacio Común (Peru)



Presentation of an architectural model to the local community. Photo by Daniel Canchán, courtesy Espacio Común.

Espacio Común is a non-profit in Lima, Peru that works with local communities to intervene in public and communal spaces through architecture. Working closely with the self-built and self-managed communities in the most vulnerable and populous neighbourhoods of the city, they deliver important projects, such as communal kitchens, cultural centres and playgrounds by repurposing old urban structures and actively engaging existing neighbourhood initiatives.

Highlights from the Creative Bursary:

Auro Orso (Germany)



Performance of Drink up mi amor. Photo by Elisa Juri, courtesy Auro Orso.

For the Berlin-based choreographer, performer and activist Auro Orso, funding from The Supporting Act Foundation will enable him to conduct a series of workshops exploring the voice as a tool for healing within the trans community. “It is a carrier of identity but also a painful topic for many trans people”, Auro explained. But now they are “able to better support my transsiblings through artistic workshops.” Crossing themes of Indigenous futurism and imaginative gender-riots, Auro’s practice explores ideas of reclaiming and remembering as well as gentleness, humour and care.

Elleanna Chapman (UK)



Artwork by Elleanna Chapman featuring playful collage of Britney Spears.

Elleanna Chapman is an interdisciplinary artist, interested in the role art plays politically. Humorously embracing a kitsch aesthetic, their practice asks how art might be a catalyst for social change – agitating not just for reform, but revolution. They are currently a finalist at The Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford, having completed a foundation in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, in 2021.

Impact grant:

Legal Aliens Theatre (UK)

Based in Haringey, one of London's most diverse boroughs, and run by an ensemble of migrant artists, Legal Aliens creates theatre that includes migrants as artists, creatives, participants, and audiences. Since 2018, they have run free weekly theatre classes with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and with the support of

the foundation, they will launch a new project featuring women from countries that have experienced civil war.

Oroko Radio (Ghana)

Oroko Radio is a not-for-profit independent internet radio station based in Accra, Ghana that seeks to reclaim and recenter narratives from the African and diasporic artistic communities.

The DisOrdinary Architecture Project (UK)

Led by disabled artists, designers, and architects, The DisOrdinary Architecture Project is a platform that wants to change the conversation around disability and the built environment. Through education, consultancy and creative projects, they show that inclusive design is more than an afterthought, and that the diversity of people's experiences can be a richly creative force.

York Anti Racist Collective (UK)

Rooted in York, YARC is a grassroots group that supports the Global Majority community. They champion creative practice through workshops, talks and research, and work in close collaboration with MamaKula, a collective of mothers of colour.

Creative bursary:

Shadh Katba (Germany)

An indigenous, trans, queer sex worker from a working-class background, Shadh Katba is a multidisciplinary poet, dancer and performance artist who is interested in exploring the body through movement, text and voice. Thinking about the relationship between the body and liberation politics, they've said: "the body and the material it produces offer me a deep reflection of the systems, people and spirits we are connected to as queer trans BIPOC communities."

Melanie (Melli) Erzuah (Germany)

Melanie (Melli) Erzuah uses collective singing to tackle discrimination and to foster community. Reflecting on their own experience as a Black, queer, and neurodiverse

artist, they aim to facilitate the experience of belonging through singing, breathing, meditating and somatic exercises.

Saman Mahdavi (Netherlands)

Working across text, performance and video installation, Saman Mahdavi's practice delivers into the somatic movements of hands and palms to explore their connection to daydreaming and poetry. Now with the support of the foundation, they want to create a unique residency programme, the 'Invisible School for Daydreaming'. They have exhibited her work in both Tehran and Amsterdam, engaging in collaborative projects with fellow artists in these vibrant artistic communities.

Angelo Ormskerk (Netherlands)

"This grant means I have the opportunity to reach my maximum potential as a stage director," says Angelo Ormskerk. With the funding, he hopes to further their artistic research and collaborate on more multidisciplinary theatre work. As a Black, neurodivergent, indigenous and queer person, Angelo is interested in putting a spotlight on the colonial history of the Netherlands, and exploring topics around sexuality, colorism and intersectionality.

Halar Soomro (Netherlands)

Halar Soomro is an artist who works with performance, archiving, and film to explore the legacy of the Indian Partition of 1947, blurring the lines between colonial depletion and its aftermath. "I am both canvas and instrument, invoking resistance and subversion," he has said. "With the generous support of The Supporting Act Foundation, I aspire to amplify decolonial labour to foster the Hindustani reclamation by archiving memories. This funding empowers me to create a transformative narrative that transcends borders, burning the Western cloaks off South Asia."

Daniela Tovar Rodriguez (Spain)

Daniela Tovar Rodriguez is a Mexican producer and DJ based in Madrid. In 2021, she co-founded Latin Tears, a radio show which platformed Latin artists and collectives to create a space for Latin American diaspora through music.

Diren Demir (Germany)

Diren Demir is a Berlin-based interdisciplinary artist and independent curator. Demir's work seeks transformative solutions to the challenges posed by patriarchal and authoritarian regimes, and explores activism and participatory practices to develop new models of resistance through art. Demir has curated more than 30 guerrilla exhibitions on streets and rural areas across Estonia, Turkey, Serbia, Netherlands, Germany and India, and has published poetry collections such as Hail to the Fallen.

A radical alternative to the status quo of arts funding

Prominent examples of alternative funding models in the arts have hit the headlines in recent years, as seen in Ireland's pilot Basic Income for Artists scheme. Until relatively recently, trust-based philanthropy was seen as a radical concept, but COVID and the rise of AI have helped to shift the trajectory of thinking, supporting ideas that reduce bureaucratic hurdles for artists.

For their second funding round, The Supporting Act Foundation is setting a blueprint for a radical alternative to the status quo of arts funding. Founded by WeTransfer in 2021, the foundation stands apart from other philanthropic endeavours due to their trust-based philanthropy approach. By offering unrestricted grants, the total amount which equates to 1% of WeTransfer's annual revenue, artists and organisations are supported to make art rather than spend time on lengthy application forms and bureaucratic reporting procedures.

"Of all the possible approaches we could have taken, we were instinctively drawn to trust-based philanthropy. And speaking with artists has confirmed this – they are all frustrated by the difficulty in applying for grants, the time and energy required for admin. Yet unrestricted grants are still quite novel within arts funding. But I'm hopeful that things are changing – at the very least, artists and non-profits are hungry to see this shift happen."

– Jenne Meerman, director, The Supporting Act Foundation

Impacts from previous grantees

Giving artists' time, space and courage

A grant recipient from the 2022 cohort, Berlin-based artist Seonah Chae says that this was "the opportunity of a lifetime." Due to the support from the foundation, she had the "courage" to push her practice in a new direction. Chae has since received

a number of prestigious awards, such as the Förderpreisträger prize for young artists from ILB Bank Brandenburg, and more opportunities to exhibit.

Building a different art world

As part of the Impact Grant funding strand, various grassroots organisations using art for a social purpose applied for support to deliver ambitious projects. Already, fruits of this strand are beginning to be announced. A few diversity mentorship programmes, which report on discrimination and more supportive working conditions for artists, have been set up as a result..

Both the Berlin-based radio station Refugee Worldwide and ESEA music, for example, launched mentorship programmes to support the next generation musicians gain the skills and connections necessary to enter the music industry. ESEA music also published *(Re)Orientated*, a first-of-its-kind survey to highlight the experiences of East & Southeast Asian music industry professionals and artists dealing with representation and inclusion.

Cinelogue, a streaming platform based in Berlin and dedicated to cinema beyond the Western canon, launched a new curated online film library. Beirut Summer School was able to pay everyone involved for the first time. The founder Alaa Minawi says: "For me, it's like payback – although they never asked for it – for all those who worked with us for the first two years for free. This is the day where we say, 'Okay, thank you for trusting us.'"

Notes to editors

The Supporting Act Foundation

Through a series of grants and bursaries, WeTransfer's Supporting Act Foundation aims to provide a helping hand to artists at the beginning of their careers, with a particular focus on underrepresented groups and community-centred initiatives. Prioritising diversity, equity, and inclusion, the Supporting Act strives for social, intersectional, and environmental justice, using the power and reach of the arts to make a difference for everyone.

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