



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 24, 2023

CONTACTS

Sarah Fizell, ArtsConnect
sarah@artstopeka.org | 785.218.6320

Bob Ross, Visit Topeka Inc.
bob.ross@topekapartnership.com

TOPEKA'S ARTSCONNECT SELECTED FOR \$100,000 IN FUNDING FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS FOR NEW PROJECT COMMEMORATING BROWN V. BOARD

Citizen artist vanessa german has been selected to create multidisciplinary community-based works to coincide with 70th anniversary commemoration.

Topeka, KS — Visit Topeka Inc. (VTI) and ArtsConnect are proud to announce that ArtsConnect has been selected as a recipient of an [“Our Town” grant by the National Endowment for the Arts \(NEA\)](#). The funding will support a new multidisciplinary, community-based artwork series by award-winning, world-renowned artist vanessa german and will coincide with the 70th anniversary commemoration of the landmark Brown v. Board of Education (BVB) case that outlawed segregation in the country’s public schools. The new NEA-backed project will be part of “Civil Rights Summer” in Topeka, a collection of special projects and activities planned for summer of 2024.

The NEA provides creative placemaking grants to innovative projects that strengthen communities by integrating arts, culture, and design. “Our Town” is one of the most prestigious grant programs offered by the NEA, and this is the first time Topeka has been granted an award through the program. ArtsConnect is expected to receive a \$100,000 NEA grant, which will be matched by VTI. In addition, ArtsConnect is committed to raising \$100,000 to support the project and advancement of the arts in Topeka. Together, the funding represents a \$300,000 investment in the capital city’s arts scene.

vanessa german’s work appears in museums and collections across the country, including the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City and the [Wichita Art Museum in Wichita](#). Later this year, she will present work as part of an exhibition on the [National Mall in Washington D.C.](#) The artist explains that, “residents of Topeka and beyond will be invited to share stories, connections, creativity and vision through a nearly 10-month long series of creative actions that will include storytelling and writing workshops, making workshops and a performance opportunity that will take your breath away!”

“I am truly honored to join with artists and residents of Topeka to create a living reckoning and commemoration of Brown v. Board, one of the most important Supreme Court cases in the history of America,” said german. “It is humbling and exciting to have the opportunity to creatively contend with the known world of Brown, and even more thrilling to have the opportunity to bring forward the submerged voices and stories that are part of the legacy of this momentous judgment.”

For this program, the NEA selects projects that integrate arts, culture, and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities by advancing local economic, physical, and/or social outcomes, ultimately laying the groundwork for systems change and centering equity. The latest round of “Our Town” funding is being awarded to 57 grant recipients, chosen from 175 eligible applicants, with awards totaling \$4,175,000.

“ArtsConnect recently released the [Topeka Arts & Culture Master Plan](#), which contains recommendations for how we can strengthen our community through the arts,” said Sarah Fizell, ArtsConnect Executive Director. “Many of the plan’s recommendations call for us to move our community forward by telling our stories, using art to better understand our past and build our collective future. The ‘history book’ version of Brown v. Board is what most people know, but there are people in this community whose stories have not been told. We must continue the work already being done to bring these stories to the surface.”

Sean Dixon, President of Visit Topeka Inc., says: “This is the single largest investment our organization has made to support Topeka’s growth as an arts destination. Having NEA funding behind us as we look to take this community’s arts and entertainment offerings to the next level is a huge deal. Aligning the Brown v. Board commemoration with a community-led project that emphasizes equity and justice is just amazing. Visit Topeka is doubling down on our commitment to the arts in this area, and I’m proud to see partners like ArtsConnect making a difference.”

“The National Endowment for the Arts is pleased to support a wide range of projects, demonstrating the many ways the arts enrich our lives and contribute to healthy and thriving communities,” said NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson, PhD. “These organizations play an important role in advancing the creative vitality of our nation and helping to ensure that all people can benefit from arts, culture, and design.”

For more information about this project, visit www.artstopeka.org/loveandjustice.

#

About vanessa german

vanessa german (b. 1976, USA) is a multidisciplinary citizen artist working across sculpture, performance, communal rituals, immersive installation, and photography. The artist’s practice proposes new models for social healing, utilizing creativity and tenderness as vital forces to reckon with the historical and ongoing catastrophes of structural racism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, resource extraction, and misogynoir. Her work is held in private and public collections internationally, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; the Wichita Art Museum; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville; and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford. Learn more at <https://www.kasmingallery.com/artist/vanessa-german>

About ArtsConnect

As Topeka’s premier arts engagement organization, ArtsConnect promotes the arts through building community connections and broadening the understanding of how the arts enhance our quality of life. Learn more at ArtsTopeka.org.

About Visit Topeka Inc.

As Topeka's official destination marketing organization, Visit Topeka Inc. is dedicated to marketing the region as an exceptional destination for meetings, events, sports and leisure tourism, thereby enhancing the local economy. Visit Topeka is a 501(c)6 nonprofit. Learn more at [VisitTopeka.com](https://www.VisitTopeka.com).