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Mesa Arts Center to receive \$60,000 Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts
In support of Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum project and exhibition *Passage*

Jan. 15, 2020 (Mesa, AZ) – Mesa Arts Center, an entity of the City of Mesa, has been approved for a \$60,000 Art Works grant to support a collaborative, site-specific exhibition in Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum (MCAM) led by multidisciplinary artist **Cannupa Hanska Luger**. *Passage* (exhibition title) will feature ***Something to Hold Onto***, the second project in the artist's ***Counting Coup*** series that investigates socially relevant and regionally specific topics through engagement activities, hands-on workshops and collaborative artmaking. *Something to Hold Onto*, the central installation, will consist of 7,000+ 1-inch unfired clay beads created through community bead-making workshops, with each bead a representation of a life lost along the US-Mexico border in the last 30 years ([Source](#)). *Passage* will be on view in Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum May 8 – August 2, 2020.

“We are thrilled to have this opportunity to work with a national treasure like Cannupa, and thanks to the NEA, we are able to host this ambitious, dynamic installation,” said Tiffany Fairall, Chief Curator of Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum. “Cannupa and his team of talented artists bring another perspective to the border conversation that gets lost amongst the political noise. Through their art, they refocus our attention back to the human element as well as the Indigenous people, who live in border states and whose lives are most impacted.”

The project is conceived and led by New Mexico based artist [Cannupa Hanska Luger](#) (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota, Austrian and Norwegian) with collaborations by Los Angeles artist [Tanya Aquilñiga](#) (Mexican), who will create a pop-up educational experience in MCAM's Project Room, and Phoenix based artists [Thomas 'Breeze' Marcus](#) (Tohono O'odham) and [Dwayne Manuel](#) (Tohono O'odham) who will create a large-scale floor mural which the onsite immersive bead installation will mirror. The project will be journalistically documented by **Thosh Collins** (Tohono O'odham) and **Chelsey Luger** (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Standing Rock Lakota Nation).

The physical act of creating the ceramic beads aims to re-humanize abstract data and bring attention to ancestral migratory routes and the impact the border has on Indigenous land and populations across the American continents. Communities around the world are invited to contribute a bead to the installation by following posted instructions and submitting to Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum by April 25, 2020. Since the exact number of deaths is unknown, guests to the exhibition will also be invited to create their own bead in the gallery and add to the nebulous statistic.

Following the exhibition, all unfired clay beads will be transported to the Tohono O'odham reservation along the US-Mexico border to be given back to the earth in a prayerful remembrance for those who have passed while making the journey.

Overall, the National Endowment for the Arts has approved 1,187 grants totaling \$27.3 million in the first round of fiscal year 2020 funding to support arts projects in every state in the nation, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

"We are so proud to bring together extraordinary visiting and local artists to explore this important and timely topic. We invite the community to get involved and to contribute a bead to the project, giving them a connection to the human cost of our border issues and the vast divides they represent. This project can help participants and visitors reflect upon our shared humanity," said Cindy Ornstein, Executive Director of Mesa Arts Center and Director of Arts and Culture for the City of Mesa.

The Art Works funding category supports projects that focus on public engagement with, and access to, various forms of excellent art across the nation; the creation of art that meets the highest standards of excellence; learning in the arts at all stages of life; and the integration of the arts into the fabric of community life.

"The arts are at the heart of our communities, connecting people through shared experiences and artistic expression," said Arts Endowment chairman Mary Anne Carter. "The National Endowment for the Arts is proud to support projects like *Passage*."

The exhibition will be honored with a free opening reception on Friday, May 8, 7-10 p.m. along with three other exhibitions, featuring work by the Fortoul Brothers, Rodrigo de Toledo and works from Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum's Permanent Collection.

Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum is located at Mesa Arts Center, 1 East Main Street, Mesa, AZ 85201. Admission to the Museum is always free.

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About Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum at Mesa Arts Center

Mesa Arts Center's (MAC) mission is to invite all people to create and discover entertaining, challenging and diverse art and arts experiences within joyous, dynamic and welcoming environments. As part of Mesa Arts Center, Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum (MCA Museum) showcases the best in Contemporary Art by emerging, nationally and internationally recognized artists. MCA Museum provides support and advancement to artists through solo, group and juried exhibitions. MCA Museum's free admission and strong engagement programs provide visitors with free school and public tours, a robust docent program and free artist talks. Mesa Arts Center is part of the City of Mesa's Department of Arts and Culture.