

NEW YORK Amsterdam News

CCCADI's new fellowship creates diverse future leaders

Recently, twenty mid-career professionals took the next step toward becoming leaders in the fields of cultural arts, public policy and advocacy when they completed the first ever Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute's Innovative Cultural Advocacy Fellowship.

The fellows, who hailed from diverse areas and countries, represented a broad range of engaged, talented and passionate arts advocacy professionals. From June to September, this first cohort of fellows engaged in a series of collaborative exchanges with experts in the cultural arts field, such as Arts and Democracy's Caron Atlas and El Puente's Frances Lucerna, who have paved the way for both diversity in arts advocacy and for cultural equity systems that reflect the aesthetic standards of New York City's diverse communities.

Lela Aisha Jones, a performer and activist who hailed from Florida by way of Philadelphia, shared, "I'm thinking a lot about the relationship between race and immigrants, whether we are talking about forced migration of African slaves or what is happening right now ... it got me thinking about how to help each other. Going into my work thinking about how to connect it with other people who have migrated is for me a big deal right now. This is really pushing me to reach out. It's making me think about how to tie civic engagement to my performances. This fellowship was a pathway for us."

Dr. Marta Moreno Vega, CCCADI's president and founder, stated, "The ICA fellows at CCCADI have been exposed to the leadership of the field that have created institutions and public-change strategies and actions, to individuals and groups who have contributed to dismantling society's systemic inequities. It was important for us to make sure that our fellows tackled these issues head-on. They have been exposed to cultural mentors that reflect New York City's diversity, its racial and cultural groups, and that are at the fulcrum of social and cultural justice. This cadre of fellows will follow in their footsteps and engage in the next level of social engagement."

Fellow Maxine Montilus, a Brooklyn-born dance artist and educator and first-generation Haitian-American, echoed this sentiment when talking about her experience with the program. "It came at a perfect time when I was questioning how to move forward as an artist and activist," she said. "I plan on infusing into my practice as an educator, especially since I work with Black and Brown children in Brooklyn, and it's very important to me to infuse it in my work, so they get a strong sense of self and are able to empower themselves. And also as a dance artist, I make it a point to address those issues, but outside of all of that, as an activist, I'm really looking forward to building partnerships and expanding my network of people that I can work with, to push things forward, particularly in arts education and cultural policy. I feel this program has allowed me to get started on that."

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