



FINAL ADJUDICATION CREATOR AWARDS AWARD SELECTION PANEL REPORT

May 21, 2026

BACKGROUND

This report is an overview of the discussion and decision of the citizen selection panel that met on the afternoon of Thursday, May 21, 2026 to determine which of the shortlisted 2026 City of Hamilton Arts Awards nominees should be selected to receive awards in the Creator category. An annually rotating selection panel - composed of discipline-specific artists, arts professionals and community leaders – is key to the selection of recipients in each category. The 2026 Award Selection Panel is listed at the end of this report.

The adjudication session was facilitated by Hamilton Arts Council. The conflict of interest policy was reviewed, and no conflicts were declared. The adjudication process was outlined, wherein aggregate scores are shared as a starting point for discussion and final decisions are made through consensus.

CREATOR AWARD

The Creator Awards recognize living artists, arts professionals and artistic collectives working in any artistic discipline and at any career level. Up to nine Creator Awards will be given each year to recognize artistic excellence and/or innovation that contributes to artistic growth in the city, progresses the artform and expresses the cultural vitality and diversity of Hamilton's art scene.

AWARD SELECTION PANEL COMMENTS

The selection panel appreciates the 159 public nominations in this category and recognizes the work of the Arts Sector Review Panel in developing a strong shortlist. The selection panel would also like to recognize all of the shortlisted nominees in this category for their contributions towards Hamilton's artistic landscape across many disciplines.

The selection panel reviewed the shortlisted nominees' career history, contribution to the community, artwork samples, and considered their impact. After a thoughtful and collaborative discussion, the selection panel awarded nine 2026 Creator Awards. The panel noted some common threads amongst many of the selected recipients, as many of them play an essential part of the Hamilton arts ecosystem by creating arts spaces, documenting, sharing techniques, and uplifting youth in addition to pursuing their own artistic practices.

The 2026 recipients and the selection panel's rationale for selecting these individuals is outlined below.

Justin Dobbin

The selection panel awarded Justin Dobbin for their significant contribution to Hamilton's arts sector through the creation of spaces that support artmaking, rehearsal, and the creative process. Justin's work in music and arts infrastructure provides an essential platform for sustainability, enabling emerging artists to develop their craft within this "Music City". The panel was particularly impressed by the diversity of artistic expression supported in these spaces, which are not bound to any single genre, as well as the recognition Justin has received locally and internationally. They are grateful to Justin for their leadership in building and strengthening the city's cultural infrastructure.

Nathan Fleet

The selection panel awarded Nathan Fleet in recognition of their significant contributions to filmmaking, education, and the broader Hamilton creative community. Nathan has demonstrated long-term commitment to local arts development with a focus in film, collaborating with numerous community organizations and building strong, lasting partnerships. Their impact is evident through the growth of the *Hamilton Film Festival*, the establishment of the *Lights, Camera, Hamilton* film school in Ancaster, and years of perseverance promoting Hamilton's film industry - even at times when film was not a prominent part of the city's cultural identity. Nathan's advocacy has helped raise awareness of Hamilton as a filmmaking hub, supported by their role as a founding board member of the Hamilton Film Board. Their work spans multiple aspects of the craft, including producing, directing, and composing film scores. The panel applauded Nathan's dedication, leadership, and creative versatility.

Fareh Malik

The selection panel awarded Fareh Malik for the resonance of their work as a writer and performer as well as their community contributions. Beginning as a slam poet, Fareh has grown into a compelling performer whose poetry and music continue to evolve with depth and intention. Their work demonstrates a strong point of view and a distinctive voice, particularly in the inventive ways they play with sentence structure and the visual presence of words on the page. The panel also recognized Fareh's meaningful community involvement, particularly impactful as a young, Muslim man, reflected in three

ongoing projects that show significant momentum and commitment to uplifting others. With recognition such as the Hamilton Literary Awards and a continually expanding artistic practice, Fareh's contributions stand out for their clarity, resonance, and cultural significance.

Jacqui Oakley

The selection panel awarded Jacqui Oakley due to clarity of artistic vision, a deeply personal creative motivation, and an exceptional level of craft. The panel thought that Jacqui's surrealist style evolves through travels and reflects a desire to put something meaningful and personal into the world, and their hand-crafted approach gives the work a rare depth and presence. The impact is immediate – Jacqui's portfolio genuinely elicits a "wow" response - and their success spans both local visibility, including work for the Hamilton Fringe, and international recognition in major magazines. Jacqui's story, motivation, and artistic practice form a complete, coherent whole that impressed the selection panel.

Shane Pennells

The selection panel awarded Shane Pennells for their outstanding impact at the intersection of community-focused art and artistic practice, including their work with Indigenous youth. Shane plays a vital role in facilitating connections between emerging and professional artists at Theatre Aquarius and is deeply engaged with agencies across the city. The panel recognized Shane's well-rounded skills as an artist, teacher, and arts worker, as well as their notable ability to maximize grants and budgets to support their theatre mentorship program. Shane also demonstrates a thoughtful understanding of their role as a facilitator - acting as a conduit for artistic expression within the context of Indigeneity and using historical knowledge to expand and showcase important narratives.

Lisa Pijuan-Nomura

The selection panel awarded Lisa Pijuan-Nomura for the remarkable breadth and strength of their artistic practice and their deep impact on Hamilton and beyond through long-standing community work. Lisa's work spans storytelling, visual arts, arts management and arts education, and they bring consistent excellence to each discipline. As an arts facilitator, they have made a significant difference through youth programming, demonstrating both skill and dedication while modeling the arts as a viable and entrepreneurial career path. The panel also recognized Lisa's commitment to continual growth as a lifelong artist and mentor, inspiring others through both practice and leadership. With an extensive history of community engagement, including founding Handmade Hamilton, Lisa exemplifies the ability to be both a community builder and a practicing artist.

Ravinder Ruprai

The selection panel awarded Ravinder Ruprai for their powerful and conceptually rich practice, which critically examines social issues through work that remains deeply

relatable. Ravinder demonstrates a remarkable sensitivity to materials, using elements such as nylons to explore feminine experience with striking presence and intention. Their work inspires a visceral reaction - intelligent, emotional, and impactful. The panel believed that, as a South Asian artist in Hamilton, Ravinder's continued visibility and recognition carry meaningful significance for our artistic community. The panel celebrated Ravinder's sustained presence in Hamilton's arts spaces with a practice that is both courageous and conceptually rigorous.

Miss Tania Lou

The selection panel awarded Miss Tania Lou (Tania Hernandez) for their powerful contributions to Hamilton's arts community and their commitment to elevating artistic expression that is often marginalized. Through work that has travelled across Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean, Tania brings forward a voice that fosters community connectedness and belonging. Their artistic practice is well-honed and widely recognized within their cultural community, offering perspectives that are too often absent from the public square. The panel was particularly impressed by Tania's impact in community storytelling and their ability to energize audiences through a unique folkloric approach. The panel believed Tania's work demonstrates both artistic excellence and meaningful cultural resonance.

Tommy Taylor

The selection panel awarded Tommy Taylor for the strong impact and resonance of their work, which demonstrates a powerful range of expression across political theatre, performance, and storytelling. Their contributions to Hamilton Fringe, Supercrawl, and Toronto Fringe reflect deep dedication to craft and a commitment to using theatre as a vehicle for advocacy and humanitarian messaging - work that requires courage and conviction. The panel recognized Tommy's authenticity, as they actively live the values and issues explored in their art, and their willingness to experiment with diverse approaches, from technological and traditional theatre to street-level performance. They celebrated Tommy's continued presence in the theatre and out on the streets, communicating urgent ideas through innovative forms.

PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

The selection panel has made recommendations for refining the City of Hamilton Arts Awards adjudication process for 2027. These recommendations aim to provide a clearer and more equitable framework for evaluation in 2027 and beyond.

Where a project report is required as an artwork sample for the nomination package submission, the panel recommends advising the nominees to provide a broader variety of examples vs. focusing on a single project (e.g. 3 examples). They also recommend asking for imagery to be submitted as part of a project report as this provides a clearer presentation of what the deliverable looked like. Finally, they recommend that project

budgets be eliminated as a requirement of this submission component citing the example that visual artists are not asked to report on or evaluate their artwork sales so it is not equitable to assess on the basis of project budget. The impact of the work should be given primacy.

THE SELECTION PANEL

Andrea Jackman	Visual Arts / Curator
Angela DeMontigny	Fashion / Public Art
Astrid Hepner	Arts Management / Music
Diana Moser	Theatre / Arts Management
Dope Chief	Visual Arts / Arts Management
Evelyn Myrie	Arts Management / Arts Education / Dance
Jamie Tennant	Writing / Arts Journalism / Broadcasting
Kyle Robinson (Karma Kameleon)	Drag Arts
Khadija Hamidu	Arts Management / Arts Champion / Curator
Queen Cee Robinson	Music / Visual Arts / Community Arts
Setareh Masoumbeiki	Arts Education / Community Arts / Arts Management / Visual Arts
Trevor Copp	Dance and Performing Arts / Arts Management / Theatre
Vania Pagniello	Community Arts / Visual Arts / DIY

Advisors to the Selection Panel:

Megan Divecha, Hamilton Arts Council (Facilitator); Jen Anisef, City of Hamilton (Recorder)