MacArthur's 2022 'genius grant' winners picked to inspire
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"I hope that they will continue with their courage and provocation to inspire us to new places of understanding and inspiration," said Marlies Carruth, director of the MacArthur fellows program.

Jenna Jambeck, a professor of environmental engineering at the University of Georgia, received the award for accomplishments like calculating the amount of plastic created since 1950 and identifying that 8 million metric tons of plastic enters oceans each year. She got a call from the foundation after picking up her kids one day in September.

"I was just completely overwhelmed with emotion," Jambeck said in an interview.

Jambeck, 48, has led surveys of the Ganges and Mississippi rivers to establish baseline data on plastic pollution and document the systems that produce the plastic, treat it as garbage and eventually funnel it into the water. The tension and challenge of managing waste captured her attention when she was in college in Gainesville, Florida, and witnessed a prolonged debate about whether to expand a landfill or transfer waste to another county.

"I just was hooked because, you know, this is something we create every day. We have to manage it," she said. "Yet everybody wants this material as far away from them as possible."

The foundation selects fellows through a multi-stage process where anonymous reviewers nominate and vet potential candidates, usually over the course of years, with the intent of recognizing people who are exceptionally creative in their work. The fellows are not involved in their selection and receive a phone call out of the blue, Carruth said.
J. Drew Lanham, a professor of forestry and environmental conservation at Clemson University, said the fellowship gives him intellectual and creative liberation. Lanham, 57, is also a poet, an ornithologist, an activist for Black people in nature, the author of a memoir—in other words, a person who defies labels.

"I've even had friends and family and I'm sure colleagues wonder, 'Well, are you really working? What are you doing? How does that have anything to do with ornithology or how does that have anything to do with your being a college professor?'" he said, speaking from Edisto Island, South Carolina.

Among his writings are a 2013 essay "9 Rules for Black Birdwatchers," and a memoir that traces the beginning of his love affair with birds and nature to his childhood on his family's farm in South Carolina, which they lost after his father's death.

Carruth said this class of fellows is optimistic about civic repair and that the foundation is recognizing their work after the isolation, anxiety and disorientation created by the coronavirus pandemic.

Many of the fellows are doubling down on subjects that we thought we knew, she said, approaching them with new insights and from new perspectives like Emily Wang, a physician who founded a network of clinics that treat people released from jail with community health workers.

Another fellow, Reuben Jonathan Miller, has conducted years of ethnographic research on people's lives after being incarcerated. His research incorporates his personal experiences as a volunteer chaplain in Cook County jail and the imprisonment of his father and brother.

Other fellows include the author, botanist and advocate for environmental stewardship through the traditional knowledge of native peoples, Robin Wall Kimmerer; the computer scientist, Yejin Choi, who has developed new ways to train computers to understand language; the Chicago-based artist and architect Amanda Williams; and mathematician June Huh whose work bridges different parts of the field to prove longstanding conjectures.

The MacArthur Foundation reported an endowment of $9.4 billion at the end of 2021 and said it paid out $273 million in grants and impact investments that year. Its fellows program represented $15.6 million of those 2021 grants, the foundation said.

**Who are the 2022 MacArthur 'genius grant' fellows?**

A specialist in plastic waste management, artists, musicians, computer scientists, and a poet-ornithologist who advocates for Black people in nature are among this year's 25 winners of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's prestigious fellowships known as "genius grants" that honor discipline-bending and society-changing people whose work offers inspiration and insight.

The Chicago-based foundation announced Wednesday that it increased the "no strings attached" award amount each receive from $625,000 to $800,000 over five years.
The 2022 fellows are:

Jennifer Carlson, 40, Tucson, Arizona, sociologist whose research traces the evolution of gun culture in the U.S.

Paul Chan, 49, New York, artist and publisher, who works in different mediums and draws on a range of cultural references to invite viewers to reflect on the world.

Yejin Choi, 45, Seattle, computer scientist who developed new ways to train computers to understand language and assess the intent of different kinds of communication.

P. Gabrielle Foreman, 58, University Park, Pennsylvania, a literary historian who cofounded an archive of Black activism in the 19th century that has collaboratively identified and collected long dispersed records.

Danna Freedman, 41, Cambridge, Massachusetts, synthetic inorganic chemist designing molecules that have great storage and processing computing capacity.

Martha Gonzalez, 50, Claremont, California, musician, scholar and activist who has convened cross border participatory performances and collaborations around social justice issues.


June Huh, 39, Princeton, New Jersey, mathematician whose work bridges different parts of the field to prove longstanding conjectures.

Moriba Jah, 51, Austin, Texas, astrodynmicist who uses statistical analysis to study data to better estimate the locations and paths of objects in the earth's orbit.

Jenna Jambeck, 48, Athens, Georgia, environmental engineer whose study of plastics in the environment facilitates the participation of communities in managing their waste.

Monica Kim, 44, Madison, Wisconsin, historian of U.S. foreign policy whose archival research in multiple languages and original interviews reveal unstated motivations and policy goals.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, 69, Syracuse, New York, author, botanist and advocate for environmental stewardship through the traditional knowledge of native peoples.

Priti Krishtel, 44, Oakland, California, health justice lawyer advocating for reforms of the patent system to make access to treatments more equitable.

J. Drew Lanham, 57, Clemson, South Carolina, ornithologist, naturalist and writer who advocates for Black people in nature and encourages connection with and exploration of the natural world.

Kiese Laymon, 48, Houston, Texas, writer whose fiction and nonfiction interrogate the internalization and repetition of violence experienced by Black Americans.

Reuben Jonathan Miller, 46, Chicago, sociologist, criminologist and social worker who examines the consequences of incarceration, incorporating his personal experiences as a chaplain and relative of imprisoned people.

Ikue Mori, 68, New York, electronic music composer and performer whose work expands the bounds of electronic music making by incorporating live and prerecorded sequences.

Steven Prohira, 35, Lawrence Kansas, physicist who develops novel ways to detect and study subatomic particles that could reveal important information about the universe.

Tomeka Reid, 44, Chicago, jazz cellist and composer whose work draws on her community and forges unique combinations of instruments to reimagine classic works and expand the expressive possibilities of cello improvisation.

Loretta J. Ross, 69, Northampton, Massachusetts, reproductive justice and human rights advocate who envisions an end to racist reproductive policies.
and organizes toward overcoming barriers to reproductive autonomy.

Steven Ruggles, 67, Minneapolis, a historical demographer who built and maintains the most extensive database of population statistics in the world.

Tavares Strachan, 42, New York and Nassau, The Bahamas, interdisciplinary conceptual artist who has accomplished logistical feats while also elevating the histories of past marginalized artists and leaders.

Emily Wang, 47, New Haven, Connecticut, a primary care physician and researcher who founded a network of clinics staffed by community health workers and physicians to treat people released from jail.

Amanda Williams, 48, Chicago, artist and architect whose work explores the intersection of race and the built environment and invites the participation of the community in reimagining their space.

Melanie Matchett Wood, 41, Cambridge, Massachusetts, mathematician whose statistical analyses have helped answer questions related to number theory and algebraic geometry.

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