

***Project Description**

(Paragraph)(4000 character maximum) Instructions:

Describe in detail the project for which you are requesting funding. Include the purpose and goals of the project and how you will evaluate success. If you are not requesting funding for a specific project, please describe your overall artistic work plan for the year, what this grant will fund, and how this grant will support the development of your artistic career/body of work.

Leo is a dance film that explores the rupture of repetition and/or the familiar as a catalyst for change in Black community and individual identities through intimacy. The process is in conversation with the creative ways Black people connect identity and relationships. It is an experiential tracing of repetition and Blackness in relation to the Great Black Migrations of the 20th century. Leo funds cover film production, and public dissemination. Project R&D have been held, respectively, at ThreeWalls: an arts organization for emerging and adventurous artists that support avant-garde and under-heard voices in Chicago. This project centers Chicago-style Stepping, an African American partnered social dance, typically performed in late night bars, juke joints, and ballrooms. This pas de deux (step for two) dance is rooted and informed by the plurality of Chicago African-American culture since the advent of the Great Black Migration. Steppin' is rich in intimacy, sensuality, and grace. Its multi-genre music grounding (spanning R&B, Jazz, and House) is in conjunction with a performative tapestry of community. Steppin' is a cultural dance form through which generational, stylistic, and musical changes strengthen bonds of commonality, and build on tension between individual expression and partnership. Chicago-style Stepping will be worked with as historical and sociopolitical embodied material, and its terrain will be expanded with Chicago style House and Footwork dance forms. The minimal presence of Stepping in the lives of Black youth, speaks to the generational tensions within Blackness. Thus exacerbating misrepresentations of Black intimate connection. This movement collaboration guided by Cat Mahari seeks to address this by connecting the Chicago styles of Stepping, House, and Footwork, into an expanded narrative of connection. The short film is directed by Cat Mahari, with cinematography provided by Daniel Williams of Motus Cinema, presents a series of stories communicated through movement, that capture the intense, awkward and exhilarating intimacy of Black touch - including non-heteronormative relationships. The film locations include domestic and currently closed public spaces in the West and South side neighborhoods in Chicago, including legendary Steppers lounge The 50 Yard Line. The public engagements for the projects, to be held via ThreeWalls online, include the film premiere, a panel conversation and presentation on the history and development of Chicago-style Stepping, moderated by noted music historian and sound selector Duane Powell. Leo: a movement journey of renewal in touch, intimacy, trust, land, love, and community - through film and music for the Afrofuturist 21st century.