



City of Culver City

Mike Balkman Council
Chambers
9770 Culver Blvd.
Culver City, CA 90232

Staff Report

File #: 20-623, **Version:** 1

Item #: C-6.

CC - (1) Consideration of a Recommendation from the Cultural Affairs Commission to Appoint Alexey Steele as Culver City Artist Laureate for Calendar Years 2020 - 2021; and, (2) Approval of Related Artist Laureate Agreement.

Meeting Date: January 13, 2020

Contact Person/Dept: B. Christine Byers/Administrative Services - Cultural Affairs

Phone Number: (310) 253-6003

Fiscal Impact: Yes ☒ No ☐

General Fund: Yes ☒ No ☐

Public Hearing: ☐

Action Item: ☒

Attachments: Yes ☒ No ☐

Public Notification: Meetings and Agendas - City Council (01/08/20); Artist Laureate Program Applicants (01/07/20); Artist Laureate Program Peer Review Panel (01/07/20); Dr. Janet Hoult (01/07/20); Heather Moses, CCUSD K-12 District Arts Coordinator (01/07/20)

Department Approval: Serena Wright-Black, Assistant City Manager (01/06/20)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council: (1) appoint Alexey Steele as Culver City Artist Laureate for Calendar Years 2020 - 2021; and (2) approve the related City agreement for the Artist Laureate.

BACKGROUND

On May 11, 2015, the City Council considered an agenda item pertaining to the creation of a Poet Laureate position and directed the Cultural Affairs Commission (CAC) to investigate the creation of a Poet Laureate program and to make a recommendation. The CAC created an ad hoc subcommittee, conducted research and considered public comment on the subject and made the following recommendations for consideration at the September 8, 2015 CAC meeting:

1. That the City Council establish an Artist Laureate Program to include all the arts (visual, performing, musical, written and spoken word);
2. That Dr. Janet Hoult be appointed Honorary Artist Laureate (for poetry) and that her duties would include serving in an advisory capacity to the CAC in creating guidelines and selection

criteria for permanent Artist Laureate Program.

The CAC Poet Laureate Subcommittee felt strongly that creating an Artist Laureate Program provided an opportunity for a more inclusive and diverse program that would also set Culver City apart from other cities (there are many Poet Laureate Programs but relatively few Artist Laureate Programs in the United States). The CAC's recommendation was forwarded to the City Council for consideration on September 28, 2015. The City Council supported the CAC's recommendation, appointing Dr. Janet Hoult as Honorary Artist Laureate and directed the CAC to continue to work with Dr. Hoult on development of an Artist Laureate Program.

In December 2015, the CAC dissolved the Poet Laureate Subcommittee, created an Ad Hoc Artist Laureate Subcommittee (Subcommittee) whose current members are Chair Wisnosky Stehlin and Commissioner Fleischer. The Subcommittee, Dr. Hoult and staff worked on further defining and refining the program guidelines and application which were brought forward to the CAC for consideration on August 15, 2017 and again on October 17, 2017. The CAC's recommendation which included revised guidelines, an application form and estimated cost for the program (\$20,000 total for two years which includes \$8,000 for the Artist Laureate, \$6400 - \$9,600 for a program coordinator, out-of-pocket expenses, panelist honoraria, printing costs, etc.). The CAC's recommendation was considered by the City Council on March 12, 2018 at which time the City Council passed a motion approving the implementation of the program and authorizing the allocation of \$6,400 from the General Fund toward program coordinator costs with the remaining \$13,600 possibly being contributed by the Culver City Cultural Affairs Foundation (Culver Arts). On March 26, 2018, the City Council passed a motion extending Dr. Janet Hoult's term - initially through December 31, 2017 -- as Honorary Artist Laureate until a new Artist Laureate is appointed.

DISCUSSION

With input from the Subcommittee and Dr. Hoult, staff developed a revised timeline for recruitment of a coordinator and implementation of the Artist Laureate Program which allows for the City Council appointing the new Artist Laureate in January 2020.

A Request for Proposal (RFP) for the program coordinator was released in May 2019 and posted/distributed via various City outlets, non-profits (e.g., Americans for the Arts, Arts for LA, Theatre Communications Group), and regional listservs (e.g., LACN). Nine applications were received by the deadline. Staff, the Subcommittee and Dr. Hoult were in agreement that two candidates should be interviewed and were unanimous in their recommendation that Ms. Alicia Ide was best suited for the coordinator position.

Ms. Ide developed and further refined materials for the program and began outreach and distribution in mid-August. This included a press release, launching a dedicated City website page (<https://www.culvercity.org/enjoy/things-to-do/arts-culture/artist-laureate-program>) and promoting the program by email, numerous online and newsletter postings, social media, print material distribution, and special targeted outreach to local businesses and organizations, regional colleges, and cultural institutions. The original application deadline of October 4th was extended to October 14, 2019. Applicants applied online through the City's website; 17 applications were received of which 16 were deemed complete and forwarded for further review.

An independent peer panel was recruited to review the applications, comprised of distinguished professionals in the relevant artistic disciplines:

- **Kari Coleman** - actor, arts educator, and a founder of Impro Theatre;
- **Kate Dollenmayer** - filmmaker, audiovisual curator and collection specialist, previously with the Wende Museum;
- **Kathy Sue Holtorf** - filmmaker and representative of the Culver City Arts Foundation;
- **Mike Morrell** - musician and Manager of Yamaha Music Education System Department;
- **Hal Nelson** - curator and art administrator, founder of the Enamel Arts Foundation and previously with the Huntington Library and Long Beach Museum of Art; and,
- **Donna Stein** - art historian, author, curator, and arts administrator previously with the Wende Museum, USC, and other institutions internationally;

Panel review of the applications began November 5, 2019 and was completed by November 25th. Each panelist scored all 16 applications and ranked their top 5 candidates. The CAC Artist Laureate Subcommittee also reviewed the applications and ranked their top candidates.

Applications were scored based on the following criteria:

- 60 points for Artistic Quality (artistic quality, originality, and uniqueness of work),
- 25 points for Potential Community Impact (artist's impact in Culver City and the surrounding area), and,
- 15 points for Professional Development (the record of artist's professional activities and achievements).
- Culver City's Cultural Equity goals were also considered.

The five highest scoring and ranked applicants were invited to interview with the panel on December 2, 2019. These were:

- Lucy Blake-Elahi - Visual Artist
- George Kahn - Musician
- Katy Krantz - Visual Artist
- Alexey Steele - Visual Artist
- Laurel Ollstein - Performance Artist/Playwright

In attendance at the panel meeting on December 2nd were Kari Coleman, Kathy Sue Holtorf, Mike Morrell, Hal Nelson and Donna Stein; CAC Chair Jeannine Wisnosky Stehlin and CAC Commissioner Tania Fleischer; Christine Byers, Cultural Affairs Coordinator; Alicia Ide, Artist Laureate Program Coordinator, and Lee Lawlor, Performing Arts Program Associate; Heather Moses, Culver City Unified School District Arts Coordinator and Dr. Janet Hoult.

Each of the five finalists provided a 15-20 minute summary presentation to the peer panel and then answered questions from the panel, staff and Subcommittee members. At the conclusion of the panel meeting, the unanimous recommendation to the CAC Artist Laureate Subcommittee was that Alexey Steele was best suited to become the new Artist Laureate. The Subcommittee supported the panel's recommendation.

Alexey Steele

Alexey Steele is a visual artist trained in the Russian representational school. He was born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1967 and began his art training at an early age in the studio of his father Leonid Steele, a renowned artist of the Socialist Realism School of the Soviet Union. Alexey attended the prestigious Surikov Art Institute of the Soviet Academy of Arts in Moscow, and studied under internationally acclaimed artist Illia Glazunov. He moved to Los Angeles in 1990 and has been a resident of Culver City since 2013, where he lives with his wife Olga and two sons who currently attend El Marino Language School.

Mr. Steele is known for his large-scale figurative works in oil and on paper, portraiture, and plein-air landscapes. His approach to figure is rooted in the Renaissance and Baroque periods seen through the prism of Russian Academic Tradition, while simultaneously possessing a modern feel. In his landscapes and seascapes, Steele examines formal qualities of movement and distance, while in his figure works he is preoccupied with dimensional underpinning of shape. For his life-sized portraits, which he executes in a series of live sessions, Steel often captures common men and women but gives them the noble presence of royal portraits.

Mr. Steele has experience developing and implementing successful community art programming, including a multi-year community engagement project in Carson titled, "Love My Neighbor". Generally summarized, as Artist Laureate for Culver City, Mr. Steele would be focused on promoting artmaking in the city, steering the community to its own values and artistic expression, while also developing his own work. A specific plan for the two-year Artist Laureate will be developed in conjunction with City staff, the program coordinator and the CAC Subcommittee to ensure a realistic approach with tangible outcomes given the allocated time and resources available.

The Cultural Affairs Commission considered the CAC Artist Laureate Subcommittee's recommendation at its meeting on December 17, 2019 and passed a motion recommending the City Council appoint Alexey Steele as Artist Laureate.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

The two-year Artist Laureate Program budget is \$20,000, which includes \$8,000 for the Artist Laureate stipend. The budget was funded from a transfer of \$6,400 from the General Fund (approved by City Council on March 12, 2018) and \$13,600 from donations made by Culver Arts (\$7,000 was received in FY 2018/2019 and will be carried over into FY 2019/2020 and \$6,600 was received this fiscal year). Pending Council appointing Alexey Steele as Artist Laureate, the \$8,000 stipend will be paid from account number 41322400.619800 PZ502 (expense account).

The City has also provided additional support to the program including graphic design services through a contract with Clean Slate Design for preparation of various materials relating to the

program and application, hospitality costs associated with the peer panel meeting, in-house copying services and staff time.

ATTACHMENTS

1. 2020-01-13_ATT - Alexey Steele Application Materials

MOTION

That the City Council:

1. Appoint Alexey Steele as Culver City Artist Laureate for calendar years 2020 - 2021; and
2. Approve the related Artist Laureate agreement; and
3. Authorize the City Attorney to review/prepare the necessary documents; and
4. Authorize the City Manager to execute such documents on behalf of the City.