

ARTISTS AND SESSIONS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2026

	SEMINAR / WORKSHOP TITLE & DESCRIPTION	ARTIST BIOS
	Keynote (10:30-11am): Dr. Nikki Clarke, FIMM will address the theme of the event: <i>The Art of Belonging: Building Inclusive Communities through Creativity</i> - In this inspiring 20-minute keynote, explore how the arts can foster belonging, representation, inclusion, and anti-racism by amplifying underrepresented voices and challenging racism, bias, and tokenism. The keynote will examine who gets to tell stories and make decisions, the importance of authentic representation, and practical ways individuals and organizations can use creativity to build empathy, understanding, and stronger, more inclusive communities.	Dr. Nikki Clarke, FIIM, is an award-winning media personality, producer, author, educator, speaker, singer, and community advocate. She is the founder, host, and executive producer of The Nikki Clarke Show, now celebrating 18 years of independent media, and host and producer of Quinte Vibes Live on YourTV Quinte. She is the author of The Paper Clip Princess and The Black Canadian History Coloring Book. Through her work in media, education, the arts, storytelling, community engagement, and restorative justice, Dr. Clarke is committed to amplifying diverse voices, celebrating culture and history, and creating stronger, more inclusive communities. She is also the creator and executive producer of the Color Our World Black History video series.
	Seminar (11am-12pm): Join us for an artist talk with Emebet Belete. We'll learn about her life as an international artist, and about Bridging Communities: Crochet Project, where creativity is the bridge that's uniting people across local and international communities. We'll start by making a small paper and yarn sampler as a symbol of how individual contributions weave together into a collective story. Then Emebet will highlight key moments through her project's journey. Come experience how art brings people together, and celebrates diversity and community through the act of making.	Emebet Belete is an Ethiopian-born multidisciplinary artist and educator based in Belleville, Ontario. She studied Fine Arts and Education in Ethiopia and Canada. Her practice spans painting, collage, photography and mixed media. She leads Bridging Communities, a crochet project that encourages creativity and collaboration through fibre arts. Emebet's work has been supported by grants from the Ontario Arts Council, the City of Belleville and the Quinte Arts Council, reflecting her commitment to community engaged art-making. Her work has been exhibited locally and internationally, including at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, and the Parrott Gallery in Belleville.
	Seminar (1pm-2pm): Explore the Connections of African Drum Language and Symbols — Explore how African drum language, speech, music, and visual symbols form interconnected systems of knowledge. Discover how drums can mimic tonal languages such as Yorùbá, Akan, and Igbo, while geometric patterns in textiles and pottery can translate complex rhythms into visual form, highlighting the connections between rhythm, language, and design.	Dr. Isaac Akrong holds a Master's degree in dance and a PhD in ethnomusicology from York University. He has taught African music and dance at York University, Wesleyan University, Swarthmore College, and many other schools and institutions. As a choreographer, master drummer, and artistic director, Isaac creates new works as well as maintains traditional music and dance through the African Dance Ensemble. Isaac founded Humanity in Harmony festival, bringing together multi-disciplinary artists, academics, and community in a celebration of common humanity through the arts. Isaac has a strong commitment to sharing his knowledge of traditional dance and drumming with the world. As a researcher, he is determined to see Ghanaian music and dance documented for future generations.
	Panel Discussion (2:15pm-3:30pm):	Nikki Clarke, Nana Yaa Yeboaa, Isaac Akrong
	Workshop (5pm-8pm): Batik - This workshop experience is rooted in hands-on, experiential learning. Participants will actively create their own East African Modern Batik fabric art using accessible approaches such as Batik Express & Hoop Art. The session begins with a live demonstration, followed by guided creation where participants explore materials, pattern, and colour. Deon uses a flexible teaching style that combines visual demonstration, clear step-by-step instruction, and one-on-one support, allowing participants to engage at their own pace. The experience is created to allow exploration without pressure, with moments for sharing and reflection that encourage connection and peer learning. This structure ensures an engaging, inclusive, and meaningful creative experience	Deon Best - My artistic practice is grounded in the exploration of identity, heritage, and community through the vibrant lens of Modern Batik. This East African wax-resist dye technique, traditionally practiced across various cultures, has become a contemporary storytelling tool in my work, inviting reflection, dialogue, and wonder. My art creations combine bold colors, organic forms, and layered textures to evoke emotional connection and shared cultural experiences. Whether exhibited in galleries, projected onto public buildings, or integrated into hands-on workshops, my work thrives on interaction, inviting audiences to pause, engage, and connect.

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2026

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	Seminar (10:30-11:30am): Reimagining Black Atlantic History	Bushra Junaid is a Toronto-based artist-curator whose work probes the African diaspora and Atlantic Canadian history. She has exhibited nationally and in the US, curated landmark exhibitions and award-winning public programming, illustrated Adwoa Badoe's <i>Nana's Cold Days</i> and is the award-winning author of <i>The Possible Lives of WH, Sailor</i> (Running the Goat Books & Broadsides).
	Workshop (11:30am-12:30pm): Collage - Collage as a form of sampling and mixing In this hands-on workshop participants will be guided to view collage making as a form of sampling and mixing and explore what wellbeing, belonging, and freedom mean to them. Recycled or found paper from magazines and other sources, paint, and other materials will be provided.	
	Workshop (1:30pm-3pm): Storytelling - The Spider Who Crossed the Atlantic: Before stories were written down, they lived in people—in memory, voice, repetition, rhythm, and the relationship between storyteller and listener. Folktales carried values, warnings, histories, humour, identity, and ways of understanding the world, passing knowledge from one generation to the next while adapting with each telling. Few figures demonstrate the power of oral tradition better than Ananse, the spider of Akan storytelling, whose adventures were remembered, retold, reshaped, and carried across generations and eventually across oceans. The story of Ananse is therefore also a story about memory itself: how people preserve and carry their culture when almost everything else can be taken away.	Nana Yaa Yeboaa is an African/Black Canadian storyteller, author, educator, and podcast host whose work is rooted in African oral tradition and the belief that stories carry the memory, wisdom, and identity of a people. Inspired by the Ananse stories of her childhood in Ghana, she explores themes of identity, migration, ancestry, womanhood, resilience, and belonging through storytelling, literature, education, and podcasting. She is the author of <i>The Praying Mantis</i> , a children's adaptation of West African folklore, and creator and host of the Nana Yaa Yeboaa Podcast, which amplifies Black and African diaspora voices. Her work is dedicated to preserving African narratives, strengthening intergenerational connections, and reclaiming the storyteller's role as keeper of memory, teacher, and bridge between generations.
	Workshop (3pm-4pm): Telling African Stories Through Animation: From Culture to the Global Screen In this session, Gabriel Odartei, CEO and Managing Director of MAKU Productions, shares his journey as a creative director, film and animation producer, and African cultural storyteller. Through selected episodes of <i>The Mansa Family Show</i> and a trailer for <i>YAMINA: The African Warrior Princess</i> , he explores authentic cultural representation, the creative process behind African-inspired animation, and animation's role in entertainment, education, and cultural preservation. The session will also examine opportunities and challenges for African creators in the diaspora, cross-continental collaboration, and new technologies, followed by an interactive Q&A on the future of African storytelling and animation.	Gabriel Odartei is an African-Canadian creative executive, filmmaker, and cultural storyteller with more than 15 years of experience across the arts, entertainment, and community sectors. As the CEO and Managing Director of MAKU Productions , he specializes in creating culturally relevant digital media, films, and animation designed to amplify underrepresented African and diasporic voices. He is the creator and producer of <i>YAMINA: The African Warrior Princess</i> , an animated feature-length film inspired by African history and mythology developed in collaboration with creative talent in Ghana. Additionally, he produced <i>The Mansa Family Show</i> , an animated family series that uses humor to explore contemporary Black family life, identity, and Canadian culture. Beyond his filmmaking, Odartei founded the Ghanalinx Media Group to promote African culture through community events and platforms that connect African communities across the global diaspora.
	Workshop and seminar with Isaac Akrong, Jennifer Brant, and friends: Drumming Cultures - Haudenosaunee use of the water drum and how it is used in some of our social songs.	Jennifer E. Brant – Yakotchehtón:ni is a singer, songwriter, educator, and artist from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory (Kenhté:ke), Ontario, and a member of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte. A Bear Clan member, her music reflects her Kanyen'kéha (Mohawk) culture and connection to the people and places around her. For over 25 years, she has performed throughout Eastern Ontario as a solo artist, with her husband Kieran Edwards, and with her band Mustang. Her most recent album, <i>Resilience</i> , draws on Haudenosaunee/Rotinonhsyón:ni cultural values, history, and her journey learning Kanyen'kéha, while her previous recordings include <i>It's Wintertime Again</i> (2021), <i>Live at Rogue's Hollow</i> (2002), and <i>Home Sweet Home</i> (2005).

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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026

	SEMINAR / WORKSHOP TITLE & DESCRIPTION	ARTIST BIOS
	Workshop (10:30am-12pm): African Dance - Afrofusion is a dynamic dance style that blends Traditional and Contemporary West African street styles, highlighting the diversity within African dance. Characterized by expressive waist and core isolations, intricate footwork, and rhythmic hip movements, Afrofusion workshops encourage participants to explore individuality and self-expression through movement. This style celebrates both cultural heritage and personal creativity, offering an energetic and inclusive space for all levels.	Zahra Badua is a multifaceted artist whose work is rooted in dance, education, and the rich cultural heritage of the African diaspora. Trained in Traditional West African dance from Ghana and Guinea, as well as West and Central African street styles, she has performed, taught, and choreographed across Canada and the United States. She is the founder of ZahraMoves and serves as Production and Engagement Coordinator for dance Immersion, a Black-led organization supporting dancers and dance forms of the African diaspora. Her experience also spans rehearsal direction, stage management, administration, and production, giving her a broad perspective on the creative process.
	Workshop (1pm-2:30pm): "Writing Home" - In this workshop Amoya Reé will ask participants to identify something that reminds them of home – no matter where home is. Without disclosing, participants will begin to describe this object using a series of prompts. By the end of the session, participants will have constructed their own piece of spoken word poetry that becomes an ode to their home and encourages thoughtful dialogue on belonging, memory and complexities of migration across cultures.	Amoya Reé (she/her) is a Jamaican-Canadian performance poet, 2018 Canadian National Champion, and 2021 Toronto Grand Slam Champion. Her work draws from her lived experiences as a Black woman, mother, and community worker. Named one of Canada's Top 100 Women to Watch in 2023, Reé is also a public servant providing arts leadership at the municipal level. In 2025 she released her debut collection, I Never Asked You to Love Me, funded by the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts, which is available on all streaming platforms.
	Workshop (2:45pm-4:15pm): Contemporary Dance	Pulgo Muchochoma is a dancer, choreographer, musician, actor, and director from Quelimane, Mozambique, whose career spans dance, theatre, and performance. After moving to Toronto in 2006 with Montes Namuli Dance Company, he studied at The School of Toronto Dance Theatre and performed with Toronto Dance Theatre from 2009–2020, collaborating with numerous Canadian and international artists. His credits include work with the Stratford Festival, Cirque du Soleil, CanStage, and independent projects, and he has received multiple Dora Award nominations. In 2015, he founded Pulga Dance, where he teaches and creates independent work, and in 2026 he received the Jacqueline Lemieux Prize for his outstanding contribution to dance in Canada.
	Concert: African Arts Institute is proud to announce the Africa and the World Arts Symposium, taking place October 15–17 in Belleville, Ontario, with a culminating concert featuring Master Drummer and Griot Amadou Kienou Folila and his group. Audience members are invited to enjoy a free community dinner featuring African and Caribbean caterers, alongside an exhibition showcasing local visual artists. Together, the artists, lively dinner, and exciting performance will recreate the vibrant and bustling atmosphere of an African village.	Amadou Kienou is a Toronto-based master drummer and griot from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, dedicated to preserving and transmitting his people's history and values. Trained primarily by his late father, Baba Kienou, he uses the djembe as his principal instrument to blend traditional West African polyrhythms with contemporary expression. Throughout his global career, he has performed, recorded, and taught workshops as a musician, dancer, and choreographer across several continents. His artistic contributions have earned him prominent accolades, including Canada's Best African Performing Artist and the Order of Merit of Arts, Letters and Communication. Fluent in multiple languages, Kienou regularly reaches global audiences and national student bodies through the universal language of the drum.