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Sitka Center Steps in to Help Portland's Oregon Contemporary After Federal Funding Is Pulled Based on Artist Identities

*In this time of disappearing federal funding for the arts, **nonprofits helping nonprofits** is a novel and needed move to support vital cultural discourse and protected speech*

Portland, Oregon—November 12, 2025— The National Endowment for the Arts granted and confirmed 30,000 in funding for Oregon Contemporary, only to pull it at the last minute, plunging [Oregon Contemporary's Artists' Biennial](#) into danger of cancellation. The Biennial project, curated by [TK Smith](#), was already well underway when the sudden news of the grant cancellation came in a [letter from the NEA](#). [Sitka Center for Art and Ecology](#) is stepping forward with a pledge of up to 30,000 dollars to help bridge this gap at a time when support for the arts is in question. The move is motivated by a show of solidarity and alignment between the two organizations, as well as an affirmation of the importance of diverse voices in the art dialogue.

[Oregon Contemporary](#) Executive and Artistic Director Blake Shell says arts organizations banding together is what we need right now: "In a time of scarcity and uncertainty, generosity is truly courageous. We are profoundly grateful for Sitka's remarkable support at a moment when arts and culture are under threat nationally and underfunded in Oregon. Oregon Contemporary has been steadily growing, now with over 50 partnerships each year and an increasing role in

advocacy for artists and cultural nonprofits in Portland and beyond. We are often the organization donating time, space and resources—that’s who we are. I never imagined a partner would step forward with such extraordinary support; it’s truly unprecedented. Sitka is setting a powerful example of how communities can show up for one another, especially in difficult times.”

[Sitka Center for Art and Ecology](#) Executive Director Alison Dennis is deeply moved to support the Artists’ Biennial and this moment of solidarity: “Art has always tested the boundaries of freedom. The 2026 Oregon Contemporary Artists’ Biennial invites reflection on how identity, justice, and our connection to place continue to shape the American story. Sitka’s partnership with Oregon Contemporary through our Curator in Residence program affirms our belief that artists and curators must have the freedom—and the support—to think deeply, work boldly, and speak truth in their own voices.” Dennis adds that the curator of the Artists’ Biennial, [TK Smith](#), is currently attending his artist residency at the Sitka Center on the Oregon Coast. “Sitka’s residency program gives curators time and space to pursue new work; Oregon Contemporary gives that work a platform in the public sphere. Together we ensure that the most challenging and necessary ideas continue to find voice and visibility.”



Both Sitka Center for Art and Ecology and Oregon Contemporary rely on grant funding support to continue programming that is valuable to the community. Both have suffered devastating funding losses that threaten key programs. This emergency funding comes as a stopgap measure to support the forthcoming Biennial, but both organizations continue critical fundraising efforts for general operations and mission-critical projects and programs. In this state of funding crisis, they stand together.

About Oregon Contemporary and the Artists' Biennial:

Oregon Contemporary is a space dedicated to art, community and the exponential possibilities of contemporary art. It produce powerful, visionary art programs for the communities of Oregon.

For the Artists' Biennial 2026, Curator [TK Smith](#) shares the Biennial will explore themes of place, power and promise—in relationship to the land and our histories as people and nations. The exhibition will also respond to the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. To learn more, visit oregoncontemporary.org.

About Sitka Center:

Now entering its 56th year, the Sitka Center champions art and nature access for all. Sitka Center offers artists, writers, musicians and scientists residencies; provides hundreds of workshops for adult learners; as well as public events and programming. Sitka Center's growing youth program, K-8 Create, now serves more than 5,000 students in 20 rural Oregon schools, making it the largest Oregon program of its kind. Sitka is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit located in Otis, Oregon at Cascade Head. For more details visit sitkacenter.org.