



ASLA
MICHIGAN

**AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTS OF MICHIGAN**

629 W. HILLSDALE STREET
LANSING, MI 48933
P.517.485.4116
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WWW.MICHIGANASLA.ORG

February 12, 2024

TO: American Society of Landscape Architects
ASLA Medal Nominations
c/o Honors and Awards
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

RE: ASLA Emerging Professional Medal Nomination

To Whom it May Concern,

It is with great honor and enthusiasm that I nominate Stephanie Onwenu for the ASLA Emerging Professional Medal. Stephanie's visionary leadership and unwavering dedication to promoting diversity and inclusivity within the field of landscape architecture make her an exemplary candidate for this prestigious award. Stephanie's commitment to amplifying diverse voices and perspectives is further exemplified by her roles as the appointed Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Michigan ASLA Chapter, a co-founding Board Member of the newly established Michigan Chapter ASLA Foundation, and the Emerging Leader on the Michigan State University Landscape Architecture Alumni & Advisory Board. Stephanie Onwenu's remarkable achievements, coupled with her outspoken personality and passion for advancing others, make her an undeniable catalyst for the future of emerging professionals in landscape architecture.

As the creator and founder of Ijeomalandartscapes LLC, Stephanie has fearlessly ventured into uncharted territories, exploring the tapestries between art, design, history, and culture. Her Bachelor of Landscape Architecture and a Master of Arts in Environmental Design from Michigan State University, have equipped her with the knowledge and skills necessary to push boundaries and challenge conventional norms.

Currently serving as a Lead Artist and Resident Teaching Artist at ProjectArt in Detroit, MI, Stephanie continues to inspire emerging professionals by leading by example and advocating for meaningful change. Her tenure as the inaugural Public Interest Design Fellow at the University of Detroit Mercy - Detroit Collaborative Design Center (DCDC) shows her exceptional ability to leverage design as a tool for social impact and community empowerment.

Prior to her work with DCDC, Stephanie honed her skills as a Site Designer for SmithGroup in Ann Arbor, MI, where she demonstrated her expertise in creating impactful and sustainable landscapes.



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Hailing from the city of Detroit, Stephanie's upbringing has fueled her passion for understanding human interactions with the environment and her desire to create spaces that reflect the needs and identities of their inhabitants.

In recognition of her outstanding contributions, Stephanie was awarded the Emerging Professional of the Year by the Michigan ASLA Chapter in 2021. Her relentless pursuit of excellence, coupled with her commitment to advancing the profession and uplifting marginalized voices, makes her an exemplary candidate for the ASLA Emerging Professional Medal. I wholeheartedly endorse her nomination and believe that she embodies the values and principles championed by the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Sincerely,

Patrick Judd, P.L.A., ASLA

President

Michigan Chapter ASLA

12 February 2024

ASLA Medal Nominations
c/o Honors and Awards
636 Eye Street NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

RE: ASLA Emerging Professional Medal – Letter of Nomination for Stephanie Onwenu,
ASLA

Dear Board of Trustees,

I am thrilled to write this endorsement of Stephanie Onwenu, ASLA in full support for her to be considered for the 2024 ASLA Emerging Professional Medal. The medal recognizes an individual who has demonstrated exceptional leadership and considerable contribution to the profession of landscape architecture, the prospective recipient's community, and/or a firm or design team; early in one's career. I have known, worked with, and been inspired by Stephanie Onwenu over the past five years, and have seen her commitment to making this world a better place for all; far beyond herself. Without hesitation, I believe Stephanie encompasses the attributes described and is very deserving of this Medal.

Stephanie exhibited strong leadership in school, where I interacted with her through the Michigan ASLA Chapter and the Michigan State University Student ASLA Chapter, where she served as President. Continuing with her commitment to ASLA upon graduation, Stephanie became involved in the Michigan ASLA Chapter, fulfilling myriad roles with enthusiasm. She has continuously been an engaged and active ASLA member. The Michigan ASLA Chapter has been very fortunate to have her volunteer leadership.

Stephanie has been a strong advocate for BIPOC individuals. In 2020, with the social unrest following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and Elijah McClain, Stephanie stepped up to create a call to action from the Michigan ASLA Chapter. First, crafting the action plan, which included pledging to take action against racial inequality and establishing the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee to encourage, promote, and celebrate diversity, equity and inclusion in our profession.

Next, by inspiring over 20 Chapter members to become engaged and active members of this new committee. And finally, Stephanie, along with a small group of invested individuals, created a new 501(c)3 organization, the Michigan Chapter ASLA Foundation, in early 2021. This Foundation was created to provide scholarships, grants, and aid to students from historically underserved demographics pursuing a career in landscape architecture to further their educational endeavors. Through Stephanie's hard work and leadership, the Foundation has been successful in fundraising, awarded four \$2,500 scholarships to BIPOC landscape architecture students, and is preparing to award the next round of scholarships.

She challenged limitations to ASLA service when the Michigan Chapter created a new Executive Committee position, the Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Stephanie was the perfect candidate for this new role, challenging the status quo and giving the Chapter a fresh perspective. Due to the National ASLA By-Laws at the time, which informs all Chapter By-Laws, Associate ASLA members were not permitted to serve at the Chapter level as Vice Presidents. Undeterred, she brought this issue to the attention of National ASLA, insightfully pointing out the immeasurable value in both expanding our leadership path and allowing diverse, new voices and perspectives at the Chapter Executive Committee level. Stephanie successfully advocated to get this on the annual ballot for all ASLA members, which passed, and was successful in amending the By-Laws as follows: Associate Members shall not hold national office or serve as a trustee but may hold office as a president, president-elect, or vice president of a chapter.

Stephanie has been a strong mentor for students and emerging professionals. She helped ensure the connection between the Michigan ASLA Chapter and the two Universities remained strong with collaborations between the two entities. She has been pivotal in encouraging and mentoring countless students and emerging professionals through her role at the Chapter as well as on the Michigan State University Landscape Architecture Alumni Advisory Board. In the newly created Lawrence Technical University high school summer camp (a program supported by the Michigan ASLA Chapter Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and the Michigan Chapter ASLA Foundation) which introduces students to landscape architecture, Stephanie has volunteered her time and expertise to spread the word about our profession, represent as a strong BIPOC professional, and inspire the students to make an impact in their futures.

Her drive is inspiring, always looking to lift others at local, state and national levels. The Michigan ASLA Chapter has recognized her work with the 2021 Emerging Professional of the Year Award. I mentioned how influential Stephanie has been with students and emerging professionals, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention how much she has inspired everyone who has had the opportunity to serve with her. She is continuously sought after for speaking engagements, sharing her down-to-earth, genuine stories and experiences. These examples of her outstanding leadership and contributions, my own

personal observations, are but a small facet of the ways in which Stephanie uses her time, energy, and talents to make the world a better place.

Stephanie is an incredible advocate for the profession, and I anticipate she will continue to share her leadership for many years to come.

Thank you for your consideration of the nomination of Stephanie Onwenu, ASLA, an inspiration in social justice and leadership and an exceptional candidate for the ASLA Emerging Professional Medal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle D. Verseman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kyle Verseman, ASLA, PLA
President, Michigan Chapter ASLA Foundation
Sales Manager, Southeast Region
Landscape Forms
734-223-2101

It's an honor to write this recommendation on behalf of Stephanie Onwenu, supporting her nomination for the ASLA Emerging Professionals Medal. As a member of the ASLA, member of the Black Landscape Architects Network (BlackLAN), and past president of BlackLAN, I've had the opportunity to interact with events she has prepared and conversations about her role as an emerging leader. Stephanie has demonstrated leadership and advocacy through the lens of inclusion at state and national levels. Her talent and accomplishments as a leader in landscape architecture have already been recognized in Michigan, where she was awarded Emerging Professional of the Year. Members of the ASLA at large have recognized her abilities, being identified as a game changer in 2021. These factors already demonstrate her eligibility for this national award. Still, I'd like to note her impact as a champion of diversity and the standard she set for others within the network.

Starting with her role as the vice president of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the Michigan chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Stephanie has demonstrated A commitment to educating people. A notable demonstration of leadership and engagement was the diverse perspectives webinar series in 2021. Seventeen practitioners, educators, and students were interviewed about their personal experiences as people of color in professional landscape architecture. The online presentations were critical at a point in time when we as a nation were confronted with a pandemic that had many public interactions difficult, if not impossible, along with the murder of George Floyd. As part of a group of people, Sephanie's role is notable, given her role as a facilitator for several sessions. Her style was consistent in these sessions, which complimented the speaker and made the discussion accessible and personal to a broad audience across the United States. I was grateful to have had the opportunity to watch those sessions live and have referred them to others in the classroom and lectures.

Most recently, Stephanie and Charles Cross agreed to have their research on black landscape architects with connections to Michigan featured during the BlackLAN Day of Service and annual event. Featuring the work of Clinton Hewitt, a retired landscape architect for the University of Minnesota, the exhibition documented black landscape architects who have relationships with both Michigan and Minnesota. This exhibition was a representative fraction of the work that they have completed that describes the complex and essential role black landscape architects have played in the profession, including in Detroit, the only city in the United States to have a UNESCO City of Design designation- and beyond.

I cannot stress enough how Stephanie lives up to her commitment to diversity as a person who treats Landscape Architecture not as a profession or industry but as a discipline capable of introducing us to different ways of seeing the environment. Recently, I was in an equity, diversity, and inclusion session in the College of Arts and Architecture at Penn State, and one of the attendees brought up the point that one of the roles of art is not to provide answers but to pose questions. Stephanie works as an artist, presenting opportunities and ideas by making objects akin to relief paintings and landscape models. I find it particularly notable that while she is "making art," she is cognizant that this is her contribution to the profession, bridging the two public/social practices. For her, making is her professional practice.

Stephanie describes herself as a catalyst for change, committed to social justice, activism, and placemaking through education and art. Not only has she made a verbal commitment, but she has embedded this commitment into both service and practice. She makes historical records while making artistic objects. She facilitates conversation at both national and local levels.

It's been an honor talking to her about the organization's future, along with her role as a leader and role model- noting how she makes connections between people, places, and practices. BlackLAN, as an organization, has greatly benefited from her commitment as an individual and contributor, as has the discipline at large.

I highly recommend that Stephanie be considered as the recipient of the ASLA Award for Emerging Professionals. Her commitment, her engagement, and her inclusive approach to transforming the discipline and profession to be more reflective of the future are exemplary.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Marc Miller', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Marc Miller, Assistant Professor
Department of Landscape Architecture
121 Stuckeman Family Building
University Park, PA 16802-1912

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

February 13, 2024

LETTER OF ENDORSEMENT FOR STEPHANIE ONWENU

Dear ASLA Emerging Professional Medal Review Committee:

On behalf of the Landscape Architecture Program at Michigan State University (MSU), I am thrilled to provide a letter of endorsement for Stephanie Onwenu, a remarkable former student in our Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (BLA) and Master of Environmental Design (MED) Dual Degree program. In my capacity as a Professor and the Program Director of both BLA and MED programs within the School of Planning, Design & Construction at MSU, I have had the privilege of observing Stephanie's exceptional qualifications for nomination to your esteemed ASLA Emerging Professional Medal.

In 2018, when Stephanie was in our program, she served as President of the MSU Student Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) executive board, actively engaging in numerous student enrichment activities within our program. Her significant energy and time investment have been evident in her leadership roles, including organizing graphic and portfolio workshops, fundraising events, the national Park(ing) day event, the Landscape Architecture Program Career Fair, and the Landscape Architecture Vertical Studio in collaboration with professionals, alumni, and faculty. Additionally, Stephanie has represented our program at various university-wide events, such as MSU Sparticipation and the Marathon of Majors, key recruitment platforms at MSU.

Stephanie's extraordinary commitment to advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles within the landscape architecture discipline has been truly inspiring. Her efforts were rightly recognized with the prestigious Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Scholarship, underscoring her tireless advocacy in this area. Furthermore, her active engagement with the Michigan Chapter of ASLA exemplifies her dedication to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment within our field. Notably, her work in presenting the history and contributions of Black landscape architects in Michigan earned recognition from the Michigan Chapter of ASLA with the Professional Honor Award.

Stephanie has consistently demonstrated strong organizational and communication skills, significantly impacting our program and student body. I wholeheartedly recommend Stephanie Onwenu for the ASLA Emerging Professional Medal, confident in her potential to continue making meaningful contributions to the landscape architecture profession. Please feel free to contact me if you require further information about Stephanie.

Sincerely,



School of Planning, Design & Construction

Construction Management
Interior Design
Landscape Architecture
Urban & Regional Planning

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School of Architecture and Community Development
Detroit Collaborative Design Center

February 14, 2024

ASLA Medal Nominations
c/o Honors and Awards
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 2001-3736

Re: Emerging Professionals Medal – Letter of Recommendation for Stephanie Onwenu

Dear Nomination and Selection Committee:

It is with great pleasure that I submit this letter in full support of Stephanie Onwenu for the Emerging Professionals Medal for your consideration. I bring to this assessment twenty years of experience in the areas of art, landscape architecture, community development, education, and urban design. In my capacity as Director of Landscape and Urban Design at the Detroit Collaborative Design Center, and Adjunct Professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture and Community Development, I have had the privilege to engage with Stephanie Onwenu on several levels as a student intern, colleague, and collaborator.

I have known Stephanie since 2017, when I served on a jury for a design competition organized by the City of Detroit's Planning and Development Department. As a student intern at SmithGroup/JJR, Stephanie and two of her colleagues submitted the entry that ultimately won the competition. She has continued to excel in the field, while working to make the profession more accessible to Black and Brown youth. Her commitment to the education of young people includes teaching in the ASLA Michigan Chapter's landscape architecture summer program held at Lawrence Technological University, participating in the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy career day event, mentoring the next generation of young designers, and in her current roles as Lead Artist/Resident Teaching Artist at ProjectArt in Detroit Michigan.

Stephanie's ability to inspire has led her to serve in various expanded capacities sharing knowledge and support with students, emerging professionals, and seasoned professionals. Stephanie's leadership skills began at Michigan State University (MSU) where she held positions including Vice President and President of the Student ASLA Chapter. She has been instrumental in promoting the profession through Chapter events, speaking at the MSU Commencement, and representing Emerging Professionals through ASLA National and Chapter Committee Service.

Stephanie's capacity to build and maintain relationships earned her an internship with SmithGroup. She was able to demonstrate her academic abilities and learn under the guidance of professional landscape architects early during her undergraduate education. This led to a broader, more thorough understanding of the profession. The internship continued during her remaining academic years.

Due to the extended internship, she was able to gain valuable experience in multiple areas of practice, from team collaboration, conceptual design, design development, visioning, and outreach. During this period, she realized that community engaged design is where her interest lies. Stephanie was recognized for her efforts with the SmithGroupJJR Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship. After completion of her Landscape Architecture degree, Stephanie became the first Black woman to graduate from the Master of Environmental Design program from MSU.

Stephanie continued to demonstrate an elevated level of excellence and was honored as a Landscape Architecture Fellow, followed by a WxLA Scholar recognition which opened many other doors. A year later, she was awarded the Emerging Professional of the Year from the ASLA Michigan Chapter. The commitment to give back was never forgotten and Stephanie continues to serve on ASLA Michigan Chapter Committees, the ASLA National Emerging Professionals Committee, and the MSU Landscape Architecture Alumni Advisory Board.

Stephanie regularly shares knowledge through speaking as well as moderating panels on topics related to Emerging Professionals. She moderated the Black Landscape Architects Network Symposium Speaker series, delivered an ASLA Game Changer Session and Moderated an ASLA Skill – ED Project Management learning module. Stephanie continued to share her scholarship through conversations as a panelist at The Ohio State - Knowlton School Diversity Summit, MSU 125th Anniversary Event, ASLA Michigan Chapter conferences, NOMA National Conference, ASLA National conferences, and most recently the Ball State University NOMAS Symposium.

In 2022, Stephanie became the first Public Interest Design Fellow at the Detroit Collaborative Design Center at the University of Detroit Mercy. We collaborated on several projects which afforded her the opportunity to engage community residents and stakeholders as a part of the design process. She managed projects of multiple scales and mentored student designers. During her time as a Fellow, she received a Michigan Chapter Award of Honor from a jury of peers in the Research and Communications category for “Their Untold Stories: Black Landscape Architects Michigan Connection” for her work to celebrate those left out of the history books.

It is not often that you find an emerging professional affecting change on a local, state, and national level. Stephanie has had an immense impact on this profession, and she has just begun. Her contributions to landscape architecture, design, and social justice will be felt by future generations to come. I cannot think of anyone more deserving of this honor.

Respectfully submitted,



Charles Cross, ASLA
2018 Fulbright-Hays Fellow
Director, Landscape + Urban Design
Detroit Collaborative Design Center

4001 W. McNichols Road
Detroit, Michigan 48221-3038
crossca@udmercy.edu

THE ENGLEWOOD NATURE TRAIL

Location: Chicago, IL

Project description:

The Englewood Nature Trail is an elevated vacant rail line located in the Englewood neighborhood in South Chicago to be redevelop and converted into a pedestrian and bicycle greenway facility. The nature trail will connect users to critical nodes along the corridor and serve as an accessible route between food, farms, and employment for the area's residents. The graphic displays a conceptual trail design for the Englewood Nature Trail and surrounding areas.

Project Drivers:

- Anti-displacement
- Environmental Quality
- Habitat Restoration
- Economic Catalyst
- Recreation



Model Design: Completed as an independent study. SmithGroup x Ijeomalandartscapes LLC (Stephanie's art practice) collaboration visualizing a conceptual design shown through a 8" x 10" mixed media artwork model.



MORNINGSIDE ONE PARK (GAPGAP)

Location: Detroit, MI

Project description:

As a team of landscape architects and designers, Humans For Design, believes that parks should be sustainable, universal, and provide amenities that appeal to a diverse range of users. Through community engagement, Stephanie's team "Humans For Design" created a canvas that reflects what the Morningside residents envisioned to see in their neighborhood park. Using a "swoop-like" pedestrian walkway as a strong gateway through the site connects the existing four street corners as one unified-cohesive park. The design of "One Park" embodies that same character, vernacular and identity of Morningside; a place where people can come together and express themselves, while strengthening the community.



(City of Detroit's Give A Park, Get A Park design competition 2017)

THEIR UNTOLD STORIES BLACK LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS MICHIGAN CONNECTION

**Location: University of Detroit Mercy -
Detroit, MI**

Project description:

Their Untold Stories - Black Landscape Architects Michigan Connection is a collaborative research project and exhibition exploring the history, efforts, impacts and journeys of Black landscape architects, artists and designers with a Michigan connection and how their influences have impacted their journey and career in the profession. Displayed through a visually compelling timeline of stories, this research forms a deeper unified linkage to the state of Michigan, the city of Detroit and surrounding areas. Recognized as an event a part of the 2022 Detroit Month of Design, a citywide festival celebration that invites creatives to submit ideas for experiences appealing to local and global audiences, highlights why Detroit serves as the first and only UNESCO City of Design in the United States.



"The proposed exhibition seems to have great potential due to its groundbreaking nature and content"

- Everett Fly

Received a 2023 Professional Honor Award for Research and Communications - Michigan ASLA Chapter

ART + OUTREACH

WATER BLOCK KIDS™

2023 SUMMER CAMP

Location: New Orleans, Louisiana

Project description:

WATER BLOCK Kids™ teaches youth about design through educational programs and products. Their programs and products focus on four design elements including architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning and real estate. During the summer camp, kids meet with design professionals, and use hands-on interactions, field trips and creative problem solving activities to address design challenges. The 2023 design challenge was “**How can kids design a better neighborhood against flooding?**” As an invited guest speaker, Stephanie conducted a virtual artsclapes and model making workshop with youth ages 6-12 years old for a site design of a smaller project apart of a larger community effort (served as a inspiration and initial brainstorming session).



Stephanie Onwenu, ASLA

Lead Artist + Resident Teaching Artist

ProjectArt

Projectart.org/detroit

Detroit, MI

Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - Michigan Chapter

ASLA Board Member - Michigan Chapter ASLA Foundation



