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QUEER ARTIST MENTORSHIP PROGRAM LAUNCHES IN CHICAGO

Pilot program funded by High Concept Labs

CHICAGO, IL — High Concept Labs (HCL) announces today the launch of the Chicago Queer Arts Mentorship Program (CQAMP, “see-q-amp”), under the guidance of Program Director Joseph Varisco. The new program partners emerging Chicago-based artists with industry professionals through year-long mentorships focused on project- or career-specific goals. CQAMP is an Institutional Incubation program of High Concept Labs and has received an initial grant of \$2,000 from HCL for its first year of operations.

CQAMP addresses an underserved need in the Chicago arts landscape, and is modeled after similar mentorship programs in New York (Queer Arts Mentorship), San Francisco (Queer Cultural Center), and New Orleans (Queer Youth Theater). The mission of CQAMP is to foster artistic partnerships, invest in queer cultural heritage, and support healthy professional practices. The program aims to help mentees develop both a well-rounded understanding of the creative process and the knowledge of how to sustain one, such as budget planning and strategic funding options.

CQAMP became an Institutional Incubation program of High Concept Labs in December 2015. Since then, HCL has provided time, resources, and strategic planning support to launch the pilot program. Funds distributed to CQAMP will develop the program and provide direct support to artists. "Supporting Chicago artists is a key function of High Concept Labs," says Steven Wang, HCL's Executive Director. "Supporting CQAMP and the mentor/mentee relationships the program fosters is another way we ensure that we continue to do this."

The first artist to receive guidance from the program is musician and performer ALEXA GRÆ, who will be mentored by former Executive Vice President and General Manager of Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Steve Abrams. The year-long mentorship will culminate in an exhibition of accomplishments.

“There is a need and a desire to learn and share knowledge,” says Varisco. “There is a need and a desire for our queer communities to have a tangible and active history—to build a sustainable future together.”

Learn more about the Chicago Queer Arts Mentorship Program: highconceptlabs.org/cqamp

About Joseph Varisco: Joseph Varisco performs independent production and development support to underrepresented, HIV+, and queer populations as the founder of JRV MAJESTY Productions, Director of Development at The Inconvenience, co-curator at Salonathon, and Resident Curator for Poonie's Cabaret at Links Hall. Varisco is the creator of the annual performance series QUEER, ILL, & OKAY (QIO), a recipient of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and Visual AIDS grants. JRV MAJESTY Productions works QIO and POST-Q were listed in NewCity Chicago's Top 5 Queer/Trans Performances. Most recently Varisco was a featured artist at Chicago History Museum's OUT at CHM series.

About High Concept Labs: High Concept Labs is a Chicago-born not-for-profit arts service organization and cultural platform dedicated to supporting working artists and engaging the Chicago community with arts and culture. Partnering with artists at every step of the creative process, HCL offers high-quality custom support services through its Sponsored Artist and Institutional Incubation Programs. HCL also curates and hosts Cultural Conversations, hosts artist showcases, presents special community events, and facilitates educational arts partnerships. With a vibrant cycle of programs, and process-support, High Concept Labs grows community alongside culture and fosters new audiences for the arts.

highconceptlabs.org

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website: highconceptlabs.org

calendar of events: highconceptlabs.org/calendar/

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HCL is based at Mana Contemporary Chicago in the Pilsen neighborhood, at 2233 S. Throop St. Chicago, Illinois 60608.

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