

TODD LANIER LESTER
lanier.lester@gmail.com
+1 917 952-4933
www.tllester.info

Leadership, research and artistic practice advancing cultural initiatives beyond expression, generating institutional frameworks, safety, economic participation, and community agency.

SELECTED WRITING AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

“Interview With Sara Gadalla Gubara” *South Parade*, April 2026, An in-depth dialogue exploring the artistic legacy, archival preservation, and diasporic resonance of one of Sudan’s leading filmmakers, highlighting her work shaping national identity and historical consciousness.

Artist Safety Hosting: Guide to History, Ethics & Practice (2019) A field guide developed from five years building a global artist refuge program in NYC; combining research, policy, and lived practice. Currently in use by arts organizations, municipalities and other institutions.

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Luv ‘til it Hurts, Founder (2018–present) Designed transnational cultural initiative addressing HIV-related stigma across Brazil, Egypt, Colombia, France, and the United States; continue to provide strategic and artistic leadership. Developed game-based and participatory tools and exhibition exploring privacy, vulnerability, and the politics of disclosure.

Associação Espaço Cultural Lanchonete, Founder & Director (2013–2018); Founded and led a “right to the city” cultural platform in São Paulo’s historic center, operating as a neighborhood lunch counter and public art initiative. In 2018, transitioned governance to community leadership, establishing a durable model of participatory cultural infrastructure; continues to advise on civic dialogue, community governance, and socially engaged artistic programming.

Global Arts Corps, Executive Director (2012–2013) Led strategic and operational development of theatre-based transitional justice programs in South Africa, Cambodia, Northern Ireland, the Western Balkans, and Canada, examining performance as a method of post-conflict dialogue.

freeDimensional, Founder & Executive Director (2005–2011); Advisor (2012–2026)
Founded international network of 400 arts organizations across 70 countries providing emergency refuge for artists at risk, establishing ethical and logistical frameworks for cultural

safe haven. Continued global advisory work with artist residencies, supporting the development of legal, ethical, and operational models for hosting artists in exile.

Reporters Without Borders, Communications Officer (2006–2007) Curated exhibitions and led communications strategy focused on global journalist protection and freedom of expression. Supported launch of US office for French organization.

International Rescue Committee-Sudan, Advocacy & Information Manager (2005) Designed coalition-building and rights advocacy programs during the North–South peace process, focusing on internally displaced communities.

FilmAid International, Katrina Relief Project Manager, (2005) Launched the organization’s first natural disaster response program following Hurricane Katrina.

Film Festival Co-Founder, Rwanda Cinema Center (2004–2005) Co-founded a national film festival and training program for emerging filmmakers in post-genocide Rwanda.

Additional roles include research and program appointments at the **Dutch Refugee Council**, **Vera List Center for Art & Politics**, **Center for Global Peace**, and service as a **U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer** in Cameroon.

FELLOWSHIPS & RESEARCH APPOINTMENTS

Fellow, **Institute on Forced Migration, Refugee Studies Centre**, *University of Oxford* (2007)

Fellow, **Center for Migration & Refugee Studies**, *American University in Cairo* (2008)

Fellow, **Gerhart Center for Philanthropy & Civic Engagement**, *American Univ in Cairo* (2008)

Senior Fellow, *World Policy Institute* (2007–2011)

Kathryn Davis Peace Fellow, **Middlebury College** (*Portuguese Institute* 2014; *Arabic Institute* ‘21)

Research Associate, **Laboratório para Outros Urbanismos**, *University of São Paulo* (2017)

Research Associate, **Culturizing Sustainable Cities**, *University of Coimbra* (2016)

HONORS & AFFILIATIONS

BMW Responsible Leaders Network (since 2015)

Waldzell Institute, Architect of the Future (2008)

EDUCATION

Master of Public Administration, Rutgers University (2002)

Diploma in Film Production, The New School (2004)

Bachelor of Science, Lipscomb University (1998)