



Kresge prizes significant for Detroit

BY MARK STRYKER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • December 8, 2008

The Kresge Foundation's \$50,000 Eminent Artist Award is the latest step in the Troy-based foundation's significant recent investment in local arts and culture.

The foundation has committed \$8.8 million over three years, with more than \$6 million in operating funds already flowing to large and small cultural groups in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. In addition, the foundation will award 18 annual fellowships of \$25,000 each to local artists beginning next spring.

The cash comes at a critical time. Arts groups have been swimming in red ink, struggling to raise money in Michigan's ransacked economy. But Kresge's willingness to fund not just institutions but individuals suddenly makes metro Detroit a national leader when it comes to supporting artists in their studios.

Other foundations and government agencies around the country award grants to individuals, but the scale of Kresge's \$500,000 annual commitment appears unique. Arts advocates said the fellowships could have a transformational impact, keeping artists anchored in metro Detroit rather than feeling compelled to leave for greener pastures.

Artist Jef Bourgeau, director of the Museum of New Art in Pontiac, said that the Kresge awards "now lie at the heart of Detroit's future contemporary culture, not only regionally but, in overall awareness, nationally as well."

While the Eminent Artist Award and fellowships are going to visual artists this year, later years will reward performing and literary artists.

Kresge president Rip Rapson said the fellowships were designed to make it possible for artists to concentrate on their work for at least a year without having to wait tables or something similar to pay the bills. The foundation's arts support -- a long-term commitment slated to continue far into the future -- is aimed at strengthening the overall ecology of culture in metro Detroit.

"We can't acknowledge the past or aspirations for the future without artists making daily contributions to life in Detroit," said Rapson.