



Kresge gives awards, fellowships to local artists

Part of \$8.8 million commitment

By Liz Voss | December 18, 2008

In a landmark move, The Kresge Foundation is providing significant cash awards and fellowships to artists in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties — 18 fellowships of \$25,000 each and a \$50,000 award to an established artist.

“This is really unprecedented in this area,” says Michelle Perron, 44, director of Kresge Arts in Detroit, director of the College for Creative Studies Center Galleries in Detroit, and director of the CCS Woodward Lecture Series. “Never before has a foundation or organization given this much to individual artists. It is really extraordinary. I feel it will fuel Detroit’s creative economy.”

The money is part of a three-pronged effort that also includes \$6.6 million in unrestricted operating grants to arts and cultural nonprofits.

In all, Troy-based Kresge has committed \$8.8 million to the arts and cultural community of metro Detroit until 2010. This support for the arts is part of the foundation’s Detroit Program, a five-part community-development effort to strengthen the long-term economic, social and cultural fabric of the city and surrounding area.

In initiating the fellowships and Eminent Artist Award, Kresge recognizes the importance of supporting individual artists, says Alice Carle, senior program officer for the foundation.

“Artists elevate our awareness, provoke and challenge us, and contribute to a better quality of life,” she says. “We’re hoping that a byproduct of this will be that artists can stay here and be celebrated.”

The artist support is a hybrid of similar programs provided by organizations like The McKnight Foundation, Minneapolis, Minn.; Bush Foundation, St. Paul, Minn.; and Creative Capital Foundation, New York, Carle says.

Minneapolis has a strong support system for its artists, anchored by three organizations, McKnight, Bush and the Jerome Foundation Inc., St. Paul, Minn.

“There are very few places that have the same level of funding,” says Scott Stulen, a Minneapolis mixed-media artist; project director of mnartists.org, a Minneapolis-based site for artists, sponsored by McKnight and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; and director of McKnight’s Fellowships for Photographers. “It’s a huge advantage. For a lot of artists, it is why they’ve decided to stay here.”

Charles McGee, 84, a longtime Detroit artist of international renown, was named the first winner of the Kresge Eminent Artist Award on Dec. 8. The honor and \$50,000 prize recognizes an exceptional artist who has made a longstanding contribution to metro Detroit arts. In even-numbered years, a visual artist is selected, and in odd-numbered years, a performing or literary artist is chosen.

McGee’s paintings, sculptures and assemblages are in public and private collections around the world. He has shown his work in solo and group exhibitions nationally and internationally in galleries and museums including the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

He taught art at Eastern Michigan University from 1969 to 1987; founded a community art school, the McGee School of Art, in Detroit, in 1969; and co-founded the Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit in 1978. Though he never earned a high school degree, he was awarded honorary doctorates in fine arts from Marygrove College in Detroit and the CCS.

“During my life on this planet, I have experienced moments that measure five, six and even a rare seven on the Richter scale, but tonight, this is indeed the big one,” he said during a private dinner reception.

The Eminent Artist was selected by a panel of three arts professionals who remained anonymous until the award was announced. The 2008 review panel included Gerhardt Knodel, fiber artist and former director of Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills; Dennis Alan Nawrocki, art historian and author of *Art in Detroit Public Places*, published by Wayne State University Press; and Cledie Taylor, founder and director of Arts Extended Gallery in Detroit. The panelists were chosen by a 19-person advisory council of metro Detroit arts professionals.

The Kresge Artist Fellowships will recognize 18 emerging and established metro Detroit artists each year, alternating between visual artists in odd-numbered years and performing and literary artists in even-numbered years. Winners will be awarded \$25,000 and customized professional development opportunities by ArtServe Michigan in Wixom. A call for applications for visual artists was issued Nov. 1. Information sessions for potential applicants will be held on Jan. 14 at CCS. Applications are available on Kresge’s Web site, <http://kresge.collegeforcreativestudies.edu/>. The deadline for applications is Feb. 27. The 2009 fellows in visual arts will be announced in June.