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COMMEMORATIVE EDITION**

## **ARTISTIC EMINENCE**

### **THE KRESGE FOUNDATION GIVES DETROIT ARTISTS THE RECOGNITION THEY DESERVE**

The Detroit arts community has never lacked for talent. But despite this wealth of creative genius, there has certainly been a distinct lack of, well, wealth. Money may not drive our city's visual, literary and performing artists, but there's no doubt they need it, whether to buy materials or simply pay household bills. Last month, the Kresge Foundation – a \$3.5 million private foundation based in Troy – stepped forward to announce Kresge Arts in Detroit, a new program that

will pump \$8.8 million into the local arts community over the next two years.

Thirty-six local artists will be awarded Kresge Artist Fellowships worth \$25,000 each, which they may use in any way they see fit. Arts and cultural organizations will receive direct operating support, and one Eminent Artist award of \$50,000 will be granted each year to an artist who has made a long-standing contribution to metro Detroit's cultural community.

The first Eminent Artist winner is Charles McGee, who, in the past eight decades, has gone from sharecropping in South Carolina to exhibiting his paintings and assemblages throughout the world. From signing his name with a simple "X" when he first arrived in Michigan to teaching college courses in art, he is a shining example of just how strong the creative urge can be. And how far it can take you.

"It's been 84 years of traveling toward something and hoping that you'll get to the top of the mountain," says McGee, who took courses at the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts (now the College for Creative Studies) in the 1940s and '50s and now resides in Detroit. "Receiving this award feels like something that has never happened to me before. And especially at this age, that is something that is really magnificent."

In addition to using his grant money to travel back to Spain, where he studied in the late '60s, McGee plans to pay off his daughter's student loans.

"I don't have to have money to validate what I do," he says, "because to me, the recognition is what it's about. But what this does is it makes things a bit easier."

Kresge Arts In Detroit will also make things easier for scores of up-and-coming artists. In 2009, 18 visual artists will be awarded unrestricted fellowships (the deadline to apply is February 27), and in 2010, the 18 awards will be given to performing and literary artists.

"I really expect this to change the narrative about arts in Detroit," says Michelle Perron, who, with help from a panel of art experts, is directing the KAID program through CCS. "And in light of this critical juncture, for artists to be given this opportunity is astounding. It's really going to help fuel the cultural economy. Not only will it keep artists in the community, it has all the potential to attract artists."

– Liz Hill

[kresge.org](http://kresge.org)