



June 29, 2009

## Kresge gives 18 local visual artists \$25,000 fellowships

Foundation's first-time gifts total \$450,000

*BY MARK STRYKER  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER*

### Posted June 30 at 12:01 a.m.

A hopeful Kristin Beaver recently told friends that if she won a \$25,000 Kresge Artist Fellowship, she thought it might change her life. Now that the money is actually on its way, she's positive that it will.

"It means that I can spend a lot of concentrated time in the studio and acquire the supplies I need," said the elated 30-year-old Detroit painter, who teaches part-time. "I've been working with next to nothing or going into debt. I'm going to look into health insurance. Mostly what it means is that I can concentrate on my work."

The Troy-based Kresge Foundation today announced \$450,000 in grants to 18 local visual artists. The \$25,000 no-strings fellowships, which inaugurate one of the country's most lucrative annual awards available to artists, are designed to give winners financial breathing room to allow them to focus on making art.

Advocates say the fellowships could have a galvanizing effect on the local arts scene -- boosting public perception of an overlooked community, inspiring artists to create more ambitious work and offering them an incentive to remain here rather than leave for New York or elsewhere. For those winners living without full-time faculty jobs or other support, the fellowship offers the promise of stability.

"This is one of the best things to happen to the city," said fellowship winner Susan Goethel Campbell. "To support artists is such a difficult thing to do. It's so low on the totem pole. But it's so energizing for a community. It's not always practical, but it does a lot to open minds, nurture creativity and change perceptions."

The fellowships cut a broad swath through Detroit's visual artists, from emerging talents like Beaver, who paints energetic figurative portraits of her generation, to widely known veterans like Gordon Newton, 60, whose gritty sculptures helped define the Cass Corridor movement in the early '70s. Nearly 400 artists applied; only residents of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties were eligible.

Other winners include: painter Shiva Ahmadi, 34, whose art explores her Iranian heritage; Campbell, 53, and Lynne Avadenka, 54, who make prints, drawings and artist books; and Tyree Guyton, 53, whose outdoor Heidelberg Project in Detroit has earned international attention.

Officials are planning a local exhibition of the fellows' work.

The grants are part of the Kresge Foundation's 3-year, \$8.8 million commitment to local arts and culture. Most of the money is flowing to large and small cultural groups, a critical infusion of cash as arts groups struggle during the recession.

But today's grants open a new chapter for local arts funding by putting money directly into the pockets of individual artists, who have been long been shut out of significant foundation and government dollars. The Kresge Foundation kicked off the program in December by giving Detroit painter and sculptor Charles McGee, 84, its first Eminent Artist Award of \$50,000, bringing its total gifts to artists to \$500,000.

"Individual artistic expression is so central to the vitality of a community and its ability to connect to past traditions and future aspirations, that it was impossible to imagine an artistic environment where these kinds of individual fellowships were not available," said Kresge president Rip Rapson.

The state of Michigan drastically cut back on direct grants to artists in the '90s before eliminating them completely. The National Endowment for the Arts eliminated nearly all of its direct grants in the wake of the culture wars in the early '90s. The Kresge grants' size and narrow geographic focus has few peers.

The McKnight Foundation of Minneapolis, for example, split more than a \$1 million into 45 grants of \$25,000 each in 2008. In Cleveland, a new county cigarette tax is expected to funnel \$800,000 to 40 artists in \$20,000 grants.

Rapson said that Kresge's grants in 2010 would recognize performing and literary artists, including musicians, composers, choreographers, playwrights, etc. Beginning in 2011, however, it's likely that all disciplines will be considered each year. Rapson also said the program could grow. He said that two metro Detroit foundations already approached Kresge about possibly piggybacking onto the program.

Today's grants were chosen by a five-person panel of regional and national experts and artists Richard Tuttle and Lorna Simpson.

"This really is the most wonderful thing," says Mike Smith, 32, who creates visceral and enigmatic installations and lives with his wife and infant son in Ferndale. He's been teaching part-time to make ends meet. "I was waiting for a miracle and one happened."

Contact MARK STRYKER: 313-222-6459 or [stryker@freepress.com](mailto:stryker@freepress.com)

## Additional Facts

2009 Kresge Artist Fellows, Visual Arts

- Shiva Ahmadi, 34, Northville
- Hartmut Austen, 41, Rochester Hills
- Lynne Avadenka, 54, Huntington Woods
- Kristin Beaver, 30, Hamtramck
- Ed Fraga, 53, Troy
- Susan Goethel Campbell, 53, Huntington Woods

- Tyree Guyton, 53, Detroit
  - Chido Johnson, 40, Detroit
  - Rod Klingelhofer, 30, Dearborn
  - Abigail Anne Newbold, 33, Pleasant Ridge
  - Gordon Newton, 60, Detroit
  - Russ Orlando, 45, Franklin
  - Senghor Reid, 33, Detroit
  - Michael Edward Smith, 32, Ferndale
  - Gilda Snowden, 54, Detroit
  - Cedric Tai, 24, Detroit
  - Sioux Trujillo, 38, Hamtramck
  - Corine Vermeulen-Smith, 32, Detroit
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