



Inform, empower and unite the creative community.

Kresge grants boost emerging artists

BY ELIZABETH VOSS | AUGUST 27, 2009



Kristin Beaver, a 30-year-old Hamtramck painter, is one of 18 visual artists of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties awarded a \$25,000 fellowship from the Troy-based Kresge Foundation.



Adult Contemporary by Kristin Beaver
Medium: Oil on canvas



Cedric Tai of Detroit does abstract paintings on Plexiglas, ceramics and installations of his artwork.



Carbon Queen by Cedric Tai
Medium: Silkscreen, ink, spray paint on acrylic plastic



Rod Klingelhofer of Dearborn is a sculptor and fiber artist.



Breadcrumbs by Rod Klingelhofer

Medium: Salvaged stadium vinyl, electroluminescent wire



Senghor Reid is a painter, filmmaker and art teacher at Detroit's Cass Technical High School.



L'eclisse by Senghor Reid
Medium: Acrylic on canvas



Shiva Ahmadi of Northville is a watercolorist and oil painter.



Boat by Shiva Ahmadi
Medium: Persian tea, saffron and watercolor on paper

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Kresge's plan: Use arts to rebuild communities

Metro Detroit will be a laboratory for the Troy-based Kresge Foundation to test its theory that the arts can help revitalize economically challenged communities.

The \$200,000 Kresge Community Arts program announced July 30 challenges schools, churches, social service groups, arts organizations, artists, moms, teens and others to use arts to solve problems in poor areas of Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park.

“Large mainstream arts organizations, small grassroots groups and individual artists — a wide variety of folks are interested, which is exactly what we were hoping for,” said Susan Wood, a freelance Ann Arbor arts consultant who is administering the program for Kresge.

Interested individuals and nonprofit organizations have until Aug. 31 to apply for \$2,500 to \$10,000 grants, Wood said. Individuals must hook up with a nonprofit that will serve as a fiscal agent. Guidelines and application forms can be found at the Kresge [Web site](#).

A five- or six-person panel of community organizers, philanthropists and neighborhood activists will select winners by the end of September or early October.

This is the first of a two-year pilot program. When it wraps, Kresge will determine whether to continue.

Earlier this summer, Kresge also initiated community arts programs in St. Louis and Baltimore. Economically challenged cities were selected based on median household income, said Regina Smith, program officer for Kresge's arts and culture team. In the fall, two more cities will be announced.

“We're interested in community-based projects that address broad community issues,” Smith said. “We want local residents involved in the process and the arts to be used as a tool to unite communities and uplift spirits.”

For more information, contact Susan Wood at communityarts@kresge.org.

Five years ago, when many of her fellow Wayne State University art school graduates left for greener pastures, Kristin Beaver stayed in Detroit.

Now, after the 30-year-old Hamtramck painter won a \$25,000 Kresge Artist Fellowship earlier this summer, she feels redeemed in her choice.

“It's the best news in Detroit,” said Beaver about the new art-awards program. “I think it will keep more artists in Detroit and bring more in as well.”

Nurturing young, emerging artists is one of the goals of the program, which honors artists at all experience levels.

On June 30, the Troy-based Kresge Foundation announced \$450,000 in grants to 18 visual artists who live in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. The \$25,000 no-strings-attached fellowships are designed to reward creative excellence and provide financial breathing room so winners can concentrate on making art.

In December, Detroit painter and sculptor Charles McGee, 84, won Kresge's first Eminent Artist Award of \$50,000, bringing Kresge's total gifts to individual artists to \$500,000 thus far.

“The Kresge Foundation realized the importance of creativity as the lifeblood of our community. Never before have individual artists been awarded in this quantity and amount. It's something that's created an enormous buzz in the community,” said Michelle Perron, the director of Kresge Arts in Detroit and director of the Center Galleries and Woodward Lecture Series at the College for Creative Studies, which is administering the program.

The fellowships are part of the Kresge Foundation's three-year, \$8.8 million pledge to regional arts and culture; it runs through 2010. Most of the money funds operating grants to arts and cultural organizations that have suffered greatly in the economic recession.

Next year, the 18 artist grants will support performing and literary artists, including musicians, composers, choreographers, playwrights and novelists. The work of all 36 fellows will appear in a biennial festival. Two other metro Detroit foundations have expressed interest in providing additional financial support, Perron said.

A five-person panel of regional and national art experts and artists selected the 18 winners from more than 350 applicants. Winners represent a broad spectrum of the metro Detroit art community, including emerging artists like Beaver to veterans like Gordon Newton, 60, whose gritty sculptures and mixed media pieces helped define the industrial aesthetic of the Cass Corridor movement in the 1960s and 1970s. (The Cass Corridor was an artistic community that flourished in a depressed inner-city neighborhood bordering Wayne State and bisected by Cass Avenue.)

Other winners include Hartmut Austen, 41, of Rochester Hills (oil painting and mixed media on paper); Lynne Avadenka, 54, of Huntington Woods (printmaking, drawing and artist books); Ed Fraga, 53, of Troy (painting, drawing and installation); Susan Goethel

Campbell, 53, of Huntington Woods (drawing, printmaking and artist books); Tyree Guyton, 53, of Detroit (painting and installation); Chido Johnson, 39, of Detroit (sculpture and installation); Abigail Anne Newbold, 33, of Pleasant Ridge (installation, fiber and design); Russ Orlando, 45, of Franklin (sculpture and performance art); Michael Edward Smith, 32, of Ferndale (installation); Gilda Snowden, 55, of Detroit (painting, encaustic and collage); Sioux Trujillo, 38, of Hamtramck (mixed media); and Corine Vermeulen Smith, 32, of Detroit (photography).

In addition to Beaver, recognized young talent includes Cedric Tai, 24, of Detroit (painting on Plexiglas, ceramics and installation); Rod Klingelhofer, 30, of Detroit (sculpture); Senghor Reid, 33, of Detroit (painting and film); and Shiva Ahmadi, 34, of Northville (watercolor and oil painting).

The awards can make a significant difference, particularly among these grantees. For some, the funds will help pay for art supplies, an insulated garage studio or marketing materials. For others, the monies make it possible to find inspiration by traveling overseas. All feel able to relax a little about finances and turn their focus to art.

Kristin Beaver

Inspired by fashion photography and album cover art, Kristin Beaver of Hamtramck uses oils to paint larger-than-life portraits of friends. She has exhibited her work in metro Detroit, Miami, Chicago and Los Angeles. Her paintings are represented by the David Klein Gallery, Birmingham, and she will have a solo exhibition there in September.

But life isn't struggle free.

"My income is really erratic like most artists," she said, explaining that she prices her paintings at \$2,000 to \$10,000 each, and sells between five and 10 a year. Like other commercial galleries, the David Klein Gallery takes 50 percent of sales.

This year she'll teach two classes in painting and drawing at Wayne State for \$8,400 and no benefits. With the Kresge funds, she can at least consider buying her own insurance.

"For this year, at least, I have peace of mind," she said. "Right now I'm going to focus on building another body of work."

Cedric Tai

Cedric Tai feels affirmed in his decision to be an artist.

"It was like someone telling me what I do is worth funding," he said.

Just two years ago, Tai, 24, graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in studio art and art education. Now, the Detroit resident cuts costs by living

with three housemates and sharing an art studio in the Russell Industrial Center with six artists.

He creates abstract paintings on Plexiglas. He also enjoys making ceramics and installations of his artwork. Prices for his paintings range from \$100 to \$3,000, with the average at \$300. In the past year, he's made about 50 paintings and sold about 20 of them.

He has curated art shows for Detroit artists in East Lansing without compensation. Now he is volunteering to develop Web pages for artists and gallery owners listed on thedetroiter.com, a Y Arts-sponsored Web site on the arts. Y-Arts is the arts and humanities arm of the YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit.

To beef up his income, he hands out free samples of Vitamin Water or fliers for Horizon Wireless for \$16 to \$20 an hour. This generates an additional \$2,000 to \$3,000 a year.

In June, he got a part-time job as a workshop instructor at the Detroit Institute of the Arts. This pays from \$10 to \$18 an hour.

With the Kresge award money, he'll travel to Germany, which he believes is the current art capital of the world.

Rod Klingelhofer

The Kresge award money will bring large public sculptures from dream to reality for Klingelhofer, a Dearborn sculptor and fiber artist.

"I have a lot of ideas for projects, but I haven't been able to foot the bill for them," he said.

Klingelhofer would like to make a floating sculpture on the Rouge River and an outdoor piece made of hundreds of yards of fabric, foam and steel. Material for each project will cost \$5,000 to \$7,000. The Kresge money will pay the bill, even if no public institution ponies up the money.

Ultimately, he would like to get commissions to build public sculptures. Municipalities, he said, are sometimes willing to pay between \$1,500 and \$50,000 a piece.

Klingelhofer earned a Master of Fine Arts in fiber at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2005, after working five years as an interior trim fabricator for concept and prototype cars at Special Projects Inc. of Plymouth.

He studied geography and environmental studies as an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and later the University of Michigan where he earned a bachelor's degree in general studies. In his sculpture, he uses nylon, leather, upholstery

fabric and cast-off materials to reinterpret maps and visually represent concerns about the environment and urban planning.

Although he has shown his work throughout Michigan and in Ontario, Ohio and New York, finding buyers isn't easy.

His small pieces, which are about 4 feet high, 4 feet long and 4 feet wide, are priced from \$500 to \$800. Large pieces are 10 to 15 feet high, 10 feet long and 10 feet wide and range from \$1,200 to \$1,800. So far, he has sold only two small pieces.

"A lot of my stuff isn't really retail friendly," he said. "The hope is that a larger collector will be interested."

To pay the bills, he earns \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year as an independent contractor, designing and fabricating custom automobile interiors for companies and private clients.

First order of business with Kresge funds: Insulate the garage studio; then ditch the heat lamps.

Senghor Reid

As an art teacher at Detroit's Cass Technical High School, Reid gets a lay-off notice every summer then waits until fall to learn whether he has a job.

He grumbles about how Detroit has decimated the arts, but says he loves teaching and is committed to bringing art to Detroit teens.

It's in his blood. His mother Shirley Woodson was supervisor of art education for Detroit Public Schools until she retired last year.

The Kresge fellowship will allow Reid, who is also a painter and filmmaker, to complete two films, "W 15," a documentary about traveling 15 miles along Woodward Avenue, and an untitled movie about the creative process for visual artists.

His drawings, paintings and prints sell for between \$200 and \$5,000. He tries to produce about 50 pieces a year. For the last two years, he hasn't been able to sell his work, but he regularly donates artwork to charity auctions. In his best years, he has sold five or six pieces.

Reid, who lives in Detroit, won the prestigious ArtServe Michigan Governor's Award for an Emerging Artist in 2001. His paintings have shown nationally and internationally in galleries and museums, and are in private and public art collections.

He began making films two years ago and now feels artistically freed.

"I'm developing a new skill set," he said. "It allows me to say more of what I want to say." Being confined to only painting was "like trying to play baseball in a closet."

Reid has been researching how to find an audience for his films and plans to begin by presenting at smaller film festivals.

Shiva Ahmadi

After winning the Kresge award, Shiva Ahmadi, a watercolorist and oil painter, set her sights on a studio in Ypsilanti or Ann Arbor, close to UM, where she teaches a watercolor course.

She doesn't have enough space for her work in the Northville ranch she shares with her husband.

Ahmadi paints bright, colorful strings of headless animals, people of the Middle East and insects. She borrows the decorative style of Persian miniature painting, and addresses serious issues including the politics of oil, the instability of life in the Middle East, and the role of women in Islamic culture.

She came to the United States from Iran in 1998, and then earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Wayne State and another from Cranbrook Academy of Art.

Her materials are pricey, so the fellowship will allow her to take some experimental liberties.

Ahmadi is represented by the Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller Gallery in New York, where an art dealer sells her work in Dubai and London at Christie's fine art auctions.

Every year, she creates 10 to 15 paintings, which sell for between \$5,000 and \$10,000 each. Sales are irregular. Some years she sells nothing. Others she may sell as many as 10. The gallery takes 50 percent.

"The economy is very bad now and art is first to get hit," she said.