

PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release
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ARTISTS' LEGACY FOUNDATION AWARDS \$25,000 TO JOHN OUTERBRIDGE

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA (September 16, 2010) The Artists' Legacy Foundation is pleased to announce that its fourth annual Artist Award of \$25,000 will be given to Los Angeles sculptor John Outerbridge—a renowned artist, ardent community activist, and esteemed arts administrator and teacher. The Artist Award recognizes and honors the accomplishments of an outstanding visual artist whose primary medium is painting or sculpture.

Hinged Window with Asafetida Bags Branded, 2008. Mixed media. 20-1/4 x 17-1/4 x 3-1/4 in.



Each year the Artists' Legacy Foundation asks five nominators, who remain anonymous, to propose two painters or sculptors for the Artist Award. A panel of three jurors reviews artwork of the ten nominees and selects the recipient. This year the Foundation's jurors were **Mildred Howard**, artist and teacher; **Barbara MacAdam**, art critic and deputy editor of ARTnews; and **Robert Taplin**, sculptor, writer, and teacher. The nominators and jurors are all art world peers, chosen for their expertise.

"John Outerbridge is known as a Los Angeles artist, an integral artist in the history of Assemblage, and a key proponent of a peculiarly American style invoked by jazz music, visual improvisation, and an aesthetics of the cool traceable to the Congo region of Africa," writes his nominator.

Drawing inspiration from Dada, folk art, and African sculpture, Outerbridge recycles discarded materials, transforming them into poetic configurations that explore both social and political themes. In a career spanning fifty years that began with his seminal role in the Los Angeles assemblage movement of the 1960's and 70's, he has succeeded in creating and developing a unique visual language.

"The result," writes Holland Cotter, "was 'black art' that, by and large, avoided stereotypical markers of African-American identity and that was topically loaded without being overtly polemical." (New York Times, May 12, 2009).

Influenced by Marcel Duchamp, along with contemporaries Mark di Suvero and Robert Rauschenberg, Outerbridge was part of a group of African-American artists, including Betye Saar and David Hammons, who banded together while working in forms of Dada-inspired assemblage at the time of the 1965 Watts uprising; together with sculptor Noah Purifoy, Outerbridge salvaged his media from burned out buildings in the distressed neighborhoods of Watts and South Central.

Born in 1933, in segregated Greenville, North Carolina, Outerbridge credits his father, whose business was collecting and recycling metal machine parts and farm equipment, for teaching him to value

discarded materials. He also credits his grandmother for inspiring him with the handcrafted necklaces and beaded pouches (Asafedita bags) she used in her healing practice. For Outterbridge, artifacts made by healers to ward off ailments and ill will, possess a curative and transformative aesthetic power that he aspires to deliver in his own work.

Portrait of Willie, 2008. Mixed media. 32 x 9 x 9 in.



By manipulating found materials, such as broken glass, rusted steel, and hair, Outterbridge excavates personal and cultural histories that have been covered over, neglected, and hidden. *Ragged Bar Code* (2008), for example, consists of twigs wrapped with rags from LA's historic garment District, an area known for its sweatshops. In color and texture, the piece alludes to his mother's quilts, while suggesting, by means of its organic, repetitive forms, that even modernism can be considered a craft. Roberta Smith writes: "Mr. Outterbridge's *Portrait of Willie* gets right to the point, brilliantly extracting multiple yet focused meanings from detritus." (New York Times, December 10, 2009).

His career as an artist began when he moved to Chicago following a three-year stint in the army that earned him the GI bill he needed to go to college. Prior to the army, he had studied engineering for one year at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. In Chicago he studied painting, first at the Chicago Academy for the Arts (1956 - 59) and then at the American Academy of Art. During this period, he worked as a Chicago Transit Authority bus driver.

In 1963 he moved with his wife to Los Angeles, where he found a job painting in a production studio. The arduous monotony of painting for the production company all day and painting artworks for himself at night, led to his decision to switch mediums. After quitting his day job, he began making sculpture. For two years he worked in his backyard "just building, building, building. I started with stone and worked my way into metal and wood."

"He was doing fantastic things, as were his friends," writes Cotter. "But the chance to exhibit in mainstream galleries or museums was practically nil and seemed likely to stay that way. This reality, once he had fully grasped it, intensified his already passionate, principled immersion in community-based collaborations that operated outside market-approved models, redefined the term 'artist,' and blurred distinctions between art, education and social action."

Beginning in 1975 Outterbridge served as Artistic Director of the Compton Communicative Arts Academy, and for 17 years, as Director of the Watts Towers Art Center. In addition to art making, Outterbridge has held the positions of art instructor and fine arts installer at the Pasadena Museum of Art (1967 to 1972). He also taught at the Claremont Colleges, UC Irvine, Cal State Dominguez Hills, and Pasadena City College. Eschewing a conventional art career, writes Cotter, "in recent years [Outterbridge] has built himself a studio and resumed regular production of individual pieces."

Throughout his career, Outterbridge received numerous awards, including the 1987 National Conference of Arts Educators' Award; a 1988 Fulbright Fellowship; and, in 1994, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship; the J. Paul Getty Fellowship for the Visual Arts; the J.R. Hyde Visiting Artist Fellowship at the Memphis Institute of the Arts; and an honorary doctorate from Otis College of Art and Design.

"That his work is still little known outside of Los Angeles is remarkable," writes his nominator. "The Artists' Legacy Foundation award will go towards furthering the knowledge of this vital artist in California and beyond."

In 2009 Tilton Gallery in New York mounted a solo exhibition of the sculptor's work. His art has been exhibited in innumerable group shows and was featured in the Pompidou's Center 2006 groundbreaking

exhibition, *Los Angeles, 1955-1985: The Birth of an Artistic Capital*. His art can also be found in the collections of the California African American Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Ragged Bar Code, 2008. Mixed media. 58 x 8 x 2-1/2 in.



THE ARTISTS' LEGACY FOUNDATION

The Artists' Legacy Foundation was established by artists Squeak Carnwath and Viola Frey and incorporated in Oakland, California in 2000. With the death of Viola Frey in 2004, her estate became the first to be transferred to the Artists' legacy Foundation. Over time the Foundation anticipates adding additional artists' estates.

Asafetida Yoke, 2008. Mixed media. 30 x 13-1/2 x 3-1/2 in.



The mission of the Artists' Legacy Foundation is to promote the art and legacy of Foundation artists after their deaths and to work with living artists as they plan for the disposition of their estates. ALF supports and advances painters and sculptors of the highest quality through award and grant programs. The Artist Award program is designed to encourage professional enrichment, while allowing recipients more creative time to spend in their studios. There are no restrictions on the use of the funds by the recipient.

Through publications and exhibitions, the Foundation serves as a resource for scholars, curators and the general public by deepening their understanding of the work of Foundation artists. Currently, *Bigger Better More, The Art of Viola Frey*, an exhibition supported by the Foundation and co-organized by the Racine Art Museum (Wisconsin) and the Gardiner Museum (Toronto), is at the Arkansas Art Center in Little Rock, where it will remain on view until November 28, 2010.

Educational programs sponsored by the Foundation help inform artists of all ages about estate planning and choices they need to make about managing their work throughout their careers. A collaborative project with the Joan Mitchell Foundation entitled, "Creating a Lasting Legacy," extends the work of the Artists' Legacy Foundation, enabling four older artists to document their artwork, creating databases for future catalogues raisonn e.

There will be a ceremony honoring John Outterbridge in Oakland on October 11, 2010.

Trustees of the Artists' Legacy Foundation include Squeak Carnwath, President; Steven H. Oliver, Vice President; Gary Knecht, Secretary/Treasurer; Sanford Hirsch; Leah Levy; and Sandra Shannonhouse. To learn more about the Foundation, visit the web site at www.artistslegacyfoundation.org or call (510) 834-2787.

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