



THE HEINZ AWARDS

for the Arts, Economy and Environment

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Drawing on History and Heritage to Create Interdisciplinary Art: Heinz Family Foundation Names Kevin Beasley and Roberto Lugo Recipients of the 28th Heinz Awards for the Arts

PITTSBURGH, September 20, 2023 — The Heinz Family Foundation today named visual artists Kevin Beasley and Roberto Lugo recipients of the prestigious 28th Heinz Awards for the Arts. As part of the accolade, Mr. Beasley and Mr. Lugo will each receive an unrestricted cash award of \$250,000.

Working across sculpture, sound and performance, **Kevin Beasley's** artworks are inspired by his personal experiences of grappling with history and are constructed with culturally relevant ephemera, materials, music and sounds that bear their stories. His sculptures layer these objects, preserved in resin, as “slabs” arranged as landscapes and painterly abstract works, clothing suspended in the form of absent figures and satellite dishes that alter the acoustics of the spaces they occupy. Sound, a powerful and consistent tool in Mr. Beasley's practice, amplifies the physicality of his works, adding a tactile experience to his installations and performances. Their vibrations are felt in the body as much as their sources are seen and their sounds heard. These combined elements offer viewers a deeper way to contend with the stories within.

Mr. Beasley's 2016 work, “[Your face is/is not enough](#),” exemplified his ability to create conceptual works that blend the physicality of sculpture with sound and performance. Incorporating audio clips from riots and protests, the piece featured NATO-issued riot gas masks covered with feathers and items of clothing, which were worn by performers as they vocalized into megaphones strapped over their shoulders. The work was later included in the 2018 Liverpool Biennial and acquired by Tate.

“[A View of a Landscape](#),” his 2018 solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, connected distinctly to his childhood home in Virginia, where, during a reunion, Mr. Beasley learned that his family had leased their land for growing cotton. The realization sparked research into the materials, history and impact of the cotton industry on his Black ancestors and led him to travel to Maplesville, Alabama, to purchase a 2,500-pound cotton gin motor that had been in operation during the pivotal events of the Civil Rights Movement. The resulting work, titled “A cotton gin motor” (2012-18), enclosed the restored engine in a soundproof vitrine. The hum of its operation was visually implied through the glass, while its actual roar was skillfully co-opted from the gallery and piped into a separate listening room. The exhibition also included three of Mr. Beasley's slabs, each an 8'x10' amalgamation of objects including Virginia-grown cotton, graduation caps, pinecones, du-rags and housedresses bought at a store in Harlem where his grandmother shopped. In 2023, a monograph and LP by the same title as the 2018 exhibition was released and chronicled Mr. Beasley's career from 2011-20. In a show of the breadth of Mr. Beasley's practice as well as his influences, the book includes photographs, poems, essays and contributions from collaborators, including Ralph Lemon (a previous Heinz Award winner).

“I have a belief that histories are not only written through language but even more importantly inscribed, collected and gathered through objects, ephemera, and places we encounter. Whether it’s the texture of a weathered surface or the accumulation of stuff, the presence and existence of our activities and ultimately our lives is evidenced by what we leave behind, from footprints to legacy,” says Mr. Beasley. “My work, ‘A View of a Landscape,’ is a way for me to look at this kind of history and material residue. Not only in the long stretches of history but also in the shorter, more recent occurrences. How do we account for the movements of generations before our own — our ancestors’ — while also bearing witness, engaging, and noting the subtle movements unfolding right in front of us? I can’t help but feel implicated in this fact, so it is imperative for me to channel this through my hands with materials that bring mystery, malleability, and aesthetic discovery to the forefront.”

“My husband, John Heinz, embraced the conviction that life is made worth living by continuous questioning, examination and exploration, and he viewed the arts as a lens through which a society examines its conscience,” says Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “Kevin’s multilayered, interdisciplinary work calls us to do just that, drawing us in to reflect on and better understand the truth of our past and inspiring us to rethink how we together shape what comes next. We honor Kevin not only for his impact on the world of contemporary art, but more importantly, for creating works of sculpture, sound, materials and memory that captivate and direct us toward a more just future.”

Roberto Lugo is a ceramicist, activist, poet and educator based in Philadelphia. A self-described “ghetto potter,” he is known for wheel-thrown pottery of traditional European and Asian vessel forms that he uses as canvases for his portraits and ornate street art designs. Depicting narratives about social resistance movements, hip-hop culture and his own Puerto Rican and African heritage, they feature overglaze paintings of his heroes, ranging from Stacey Abrams to Beyoncé.

Mr. Lugo’s work and influence extend beyond his studio practice. He takes his potter’s wheel out onto city sidewalks to encourage strangers to give it a try, hoping to spark the same joy and confidence it affords him. He brings that spirit of generosity into his classroom at Temple University and gives proceeds from sales of his pots to various causes, including expunging the records of incarcerated minors.

Mr. Lugo’s childhood in Philadelphia’s Kensington neighborhood was marred by violence and poverty but was also rich in culture and community. His earliest experiences with art were making graffiti as a teenager, which he described as a way of declaring his existence and a style that continues to be central to his practice.

Mr. Lugo now creates work that incorporates materials and vessels that had been symbolic of his exclusion and remakes them to tell a new narrative using media, such as porcelain, that he’s been drawn to since art school. As his practice has evolved, he has introduced function and deeper meaning to his pots by, for example, making teapot spouts out of gun barrels sourced from firearm buy-back programs. While his pots mirror superficial design elements of artworks created for wealthy patrons, his versions speak to poverty and social injustice as well as the accomplishments of individuals who have overcome such hurdles and gone on to inspire generations.

For his 2021 solo exhibition at the University of Pennsylvania’s Arthur Ross Gallery, “[God Complex: Different Philadelphia](#),” Mr. Lugo curated works from the university’s collection and created new work in response, including a hand-built pot titled “Bridges,” featuring a portrait of Mr. Lugo’s father on one side

and Benjamin Franklin on the other. The former faced red graffitied walls and pedestals from which Mr. Lugo displayed his works honoring individuals of color who have contributed to Philadelphia's history, such as civil rights activist Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, the first Black woman to earn her law degree from Penn Law. The latter faced the portion of the gallery painted to match the room where the Declaration of Independence was signed and that showcased 18th and 19th century portraits from the museum's collection of George Washington and other historic American figures.

Mr. Lugo followed that exhibition with a Design Miami show inspired by his online platform, "[The Village Potter](#)," which gives him an opportunity to make art that is more representative of his community and accessible to a broader audience. Once again informed by his childhood and upbringing in Philadelphia, Mr. Lugo recreated the nostalgic corner stores, also known as bodegas, of his youth in the form of a pop-up exhibit called "The Village Potter Bodega." It featured smaller-scale, functional works such as butter dishes and cups showcasing the style elements he's known for, including bright colors, graffiti and references to his hometown.

"My work takes the form of creating pottery and engaging with the public to raise awareness about the issues affecting poor Black and Brown communities, including the ones I grew up in. It brings me great joy that my work has been so well-received and that I can continue pursuing my dreams and representing my community in the arts," says Mr. Lugo.

"Roberto's powerful and moving body of work is both informed by a life story of struggle and infused with optimism and the vision that art can change how we understand our past and inform how we interpret the events in the world around us," says Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. "His prolific work is transforming the art form of ceramics, juxtaposing traditional with new and layering fresh perspectives and storytelling in ways that confront history and direct us toward positive change. We honor Roberto not only for his gifts as an artist, but also for his generous spirit and commitment to helping the next generation of young artists grow and mature in their craft."

Mr. Lugo has also contributed over 20 pieces to an ongoing group exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "[Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room](#)." Inspired by New York's Seneca Village, a once thriving, mostly Black community that was displaced to make way for Central Park, the work offers an Afrofuturist vision of what might have been for the residents who were uprooted.

Most recently, Mr. Lugo's work was on view at the Cincinnati Art Museum in a solo show titled "[Hi Def Archives](#)." The exhibition opening coincided with the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) conference. His affiliation with NCECA goes back to at least 2015 when he received the organization's Emerging Artist Award. The [speech](#) he gave when receiving the award, at times delivered as spoken-word poetry, is often cited for its stirring conviction for the power of art to "kill hate."

Created to honor the memory of the late U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards recognize excellence and achievement in areas of great importance to Senator Heinz. The 28th annual awards bring the total number of recipients to 171 and reflect more than \$31 million in monetary awards since the program was launched in 1993.

Additional recipients by category are:

Economy: Kathryn Finney, Author and Managing General Partner, Genius Guild, Chicago, Illinois, is breaking down barriers for Black and Brown women in the tech startup ecosystem. Ms. Finney founded digitalundivided (DID), a social enterprise that identifies, develops, and supports Black and Latinx women-led startups. Currently, she's the managing general partner of Genius Guild, a multimillion-dollar venture firm that invests in high-growth startups that use the social determinants of health framework to build market-driven solutions in the health care industry.

Economy: Leah Penniman, Co-Founder, Soul Fire Farm (SFF), Petersburg, New York, teaches regenerative farming practices and land stewardship, steeped in traditional and spiritual methods, to Black, Indigenous and people of color to reconnect them to the land, promote equity in the food system and train the next generation of farmers. Just last year, she and her team trained more than 38,000 participants. Ms. Penniman's 80-acre family farm has evolved into SFF, a nonprofit providing youth education programs, urban plantings, mobilization training and a community-supported agriculture program.

Environment: Nicole Horseherder, Co-Founder, Tó Nizhóní Ání (TNA), Kykotsmovi, Arizona, is an energy justice leader working to protect the water, air and landscapes of the Navajo Nation. Ms. Horseherder, Diné, of the Navajo Nation, co-founded TNA (Sacred Water Speaks) to bring power to Indigenous communities suffering the environmental effects of decades of coal extraction and industry waste, and to ensure a just and equitable transition to a clean energy economy in the Black Mesa, Arizona region.

Environment: Colette Pichon Battle, Co-Founder, Taproot Earth, Slidell, Louisiana, is a climate justice organizer and human rights lawyer. She founded Taproot Earth and is the former executive director of the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy, an organization established in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to provide relief and legal assistance to the region's survivors. At Taproot Earth, Ms. Pichon Battle is advancing ecological equity in communities on the frontlines of extreme weather brought on by climate change. She does this by building power, cultivating solutions and transforming the systems that govern our land, water and energy.

Recipients of the 28th Heinz Awards will be honored at an event in Pittsburgh in October. For more information on the awardees, visit www.heinzawards.org.

EDITORS/REPORTERS: To obtain photos of the recipients, please contact Maya Brod at mbrod@burness.com or 301-467-4917 and/or Abby Manishor at amanishor@burness.com or 917-539-3308.

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About the Heinz Awards

Established by Teresa Heinz in 1993 to honor the memory of her late husband, U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards celebrates the accomplishments and spirit of the Senator by recognizing the extraordinary achievements of individuals in the areas of great importance to him. The Awards,

administered by the Heinz Family Foundation, currently recognize individuals for their contributions in the areas of the Arts, the Economy and the Environment. Nominations are submitted by invited experts, who serve anonymously, and are reviewed by jurors appointed by the Heinz Family Foundation. The jurors make recommendations to the Board of Directors, which subsequently selects the Award recipients. For more information on the Heinz Awards, visit www.heinzawards.org.

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