



# THE HEINZ AWARDS

for the Arts, Economy and Environment

EMBARGOED UNTIL  
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## From Works Inspired by the Stories of Migrants to Art that Examines History and Race in America, Heinz Family Foundation Names Tanya Aguiñiga and Sanford Biggers Recipients of the 26<sup>th</sup> Heinz Awards for the Arts

**PITTSBURGH, November 18, 2021** — The Heinz Family Foundation today named visual artists Tanya A. Aguiñiga and Sanford L. Biggers recipients of the prestigious 26<sup>th</sup> Heinz Awards for the Arts.

As part of the accolade, Ms. Aguiñiga and Mr. Biggers will each receive an unrestricted cash award of \$250,000.

**Tanya Aguiñiga's** visual artworks blend contemporary craft, sculpture and performance to address issues of migration, gender and identity. Born in San Diego and raised in Tijuana, Mexico, she draws on her life experience as a binational citizen, who as a child crossed the border daily from Tijuana to San Diego to attend school. Ms. Aguiñiga's work speaks of the artist's experience of her divided identity and aspires to tell the larger and often invisible stories of the transnational community.

Often incorporating cotton, wool and other textiles, Ms. Aguiñiga blends traditional Indigenous weaving practices and materials and contemporary design into elaborate and colorful works that hang on walls, form immersive performance installations, incorporate film and more. In 2016, Ms. Aguiñiga created *AMBOS (Art Made Between Opposite Sides)*, an ongoing series of projects that provides a platform for binational artists. Noted works include *AMBOS: Border Quipu/Quipu Fronterizo*, which captures reflections gathered from interviews with thousands of individuals crossing the border between the United States and Mexico. Travelers were also asked to tie a knot between pieces of fabric—the knotted fabrics reminiscent of quipu, an Incan method for recording information that included variously colored threads knotted in different ways—as a documentation of their crossing, together creating a large, colorful cascading installation.

In creating *Metabolizing the Border (2020)*, a reflection and reckoning with the pain experienced by those seeking to cross the border wall, Ms. Aguiñiga designed and fabricated an intricate bodysuit that has remnant pieces of the wall incorporated into brittle, clear blown-glass wearables designed to shatter and break. A video recording of her wearing the suit while walking along the familiar portion of the wall that extends into the Pacific Ocean symbolizes the struggle of the migrant experience.

“My hands translate and record human emotion through craft,” says Ms. Aguiñiga. “My arms and back labor in movements, from large-scale textile projects to recorded performance pieces that center the immigrant experience and amplify marginalized voices so we may find more humane ways of being.” She adds: “Using my skills and techniques as a craftsman, I create dynamic, lively works that offer touchstones for me and others on which to begin new ways of community building and healing.”

Currently, Ms. Aguiñiga is preparing car-crossing survival kits to give away at the U.S./Mexico port of entry so that elderly and vulnerable individuals can withstand the excruciating wait while legally crossing. She is also preparing to install clay shrines—made by asylum seekers at an LGBTQ+ shelter where Aguiñiga started a trauma-informed ceramics program—along the U.S./Mexico border fence from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico. The installation is designed to honor lives lost, pray for safe passage and remember loved ones separated by the wall.

“Tanya has a remarkable gift for capturing stories of the migrant experience and weaving those narratives into her art,” says Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “Through her installations, visitors are called to learn and to make deeper connections with people whose lives and cultures are often misrepresented because they feel unfamiliar. In the true spirit of the Heinz Awards, she demonstrates both artistic excellence and a body of work that is grounded in compassion for others.”

**Sanford Biggers** is a conceptual artist whose powerful, multifaceted work grapples with ways in which culture and history interplay with our modern society. His diverse practice positions him as a collaborator with the past by exploring often overlooked cultural and political narratives from American history. His expansive body of work encompasses painting, sculpture, film, textiles, installation and performance, employing a wide variety of media such as antique quilts, bronze, marble, sequins, vinyl and sound. His practice is a lexicon of layered histories and symbols drawn from a diverse array of references.

Mr. Biggers’ *Codex* series is his signature textile work project that includes mixed-media paintings and sculptures done directly on or made from pre-1900 antique quilts. Mr. Biggers draws from the long-debated narrative that quilts doubled as signposts along escape routes of the Underground Railroad throughout the nineteenth century. In 2020, Mr. Biggers’ largest museum survey of the *Codex* series, entitled *Codeswitch*, opened at the Bronx Museum of the Arts. The exhibition’s title refers to the idea of code-switching: shifting from one linguistic or behavioral code to another depending on the social context. This process recognizes the plurality of language, as the quilts signal their original creator’s intent as well as the new layers of meaning given to them through Biggers’ artistic intervention. In 2021, *Codeswitch* traveled to the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, California, and will travel to the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2022 for its final leg of the tour.

Following a residency as a 2017 American Academy Fellow in Rome, the artist began working in marble. Working in this traditional medium, Mr. Biggers’ series entitled *Chimeras* creates hybridized forms that transpose, combine and juxtapose classical and historical subjects to create alternative meanings and produce what he calls “future ethnographies.” In 2021, Mr. Biggers debuted his largest *Chimera* to date, entitled *Oracle* (2021), a 25-foot bronze sculpture commissioned by Rockefeller Center and Art Production Fund. *Oracle* is a continuation of Mr. Biggers’ recent *Chimera* sculptures, a series of figurative works created by combining various African and European figurative sculptural elements that explore historical depictions of the body and their subsequent myths, narratives, perceptions and power. The *Chimeras* specifically challenge the associated cultural and aesthetic assumptions about their source material while acknowledging the often-dubious origins of the original objects themselves. The looming, seven-and-a-half-ton monolith encompasses classical depictions of Zeus with what he describes as an “Africoid mask-bust figure.”

In his *BAM* series, Mr. Biggers seeks to memorialize and honor victims of police violence in the U.S., pointing toward recent transgressions and elevating the stories of specific individuals to combat historical amnesia. This series is composed of fragments of wooden African statues dipped and veiled with thick wax and then ballistically “re-sculpted.” Mr. Biggers then cast the remnants into bronze, a historically noble and weighty medium. Each sculpture is named and dedicated after unarmed victims who have died at the hands of law enforcement.

“I want the viewer to investigate the myriad layers of formal, conceptual and historical information that slowly reveal themselves after the initial encounter with my work,” says Mr. Biggers. “I’m constantly inspired by the poetic and metaphorical possibilities of historical objects and discarded materials and employ them to blur the line between old and new, high and low and to push our visual literacy forward.”

“Across the span of history, great artists have not only produced works of compelling visual appeal, they have used their gifts to push us, the viewer and audience, to confront hard truths,” says Teresa Heinz,

Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “Sanford creates works that are visually and viscerally powerful as well as unflinching in their examination of the issues of our time.”

Created to honor the memory of the late U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards honors excellence and achievement in areas of great importance to Senator Heinz. The 26<sup>th</sup> awards bring the total number of recipients to 158 and reflect more than \$30 million given since the program was launched in 1993.

Additional recipients by category are:

**Environment: Gabe Brown, Bismarck, North Dakota**, a pioneer in regenerative agriculture and soil health who is catalyzing the movement to change land use from conventional to regenerative farming practices, transforming farmland from an environmental problem to a solution.

**Environment: Jacqueline C. Patterson, M.S.W., M.P.H., Baltimore, Maryland**, founder and executive director of the Chisholm Legacy Project, a resource hub for Black frontline climate justice leadership.

**Economy: Dina J. Bakst, J.D., and Sherry J. Leiwant, J.D., New York, New York**, co-founders of A Better Balance, a nonprofit legal advocacy organization that advances justice for workers, so they can care for themselves and their loved ones without jeopardizing their economic security.

**Economy: William J. (Bill) Bynum, Jackson, Mississippi**, founder and CEO of HOPE, a community development financial institution comprised of Hope Credit Union, Hope Enterprise Corporation and the Hope Policy Institute, which provides financial services and advocates for individuals who have been excluded from opportunity because of their race, gender, geographic location and wealth.

Recipients of the 26<sup>th</sup> Heinz Awards will be honored at a virtual event in December. For more information on the awardees, visit <https://heinzawards.net/2021>.

EDITORS/REPORTERS: To obtain photos of the recipients, please contact Maya Brod at [MBrod@burness.com](mailto:MBrod@burness.com) or 301-467-4917.

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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, recognizes 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, two in each of the three awards categories. For more information on the Heinz Awards, visit [www.heinzawards.net](http://www.heinzawards.net).

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