



# THE HEINZ AWARDS

for the Arts, Economy and Environment

EMBARGOED UNTIL  
Thursday, September 22, 2022

## **Art as Activism, a Tool for Healing and a Source of Hope: Heinz Family Foundation Names Interdisciplinary Artists *vanessa german* and *Cauleen Smith* Recipients of the 27<sup>th</sup> Heinz Awards for the Arts**

**PITTSBURGH, September 22, 2022**—The Heinz Family Foundation today named visual artists *vanessa I. german* and *Cauleen Smith* recipients of the prestigious 27<sup>th</sup> Heinz Award for the Arts. As part of the accolade, Ms. *german* and Ms. *Smith* will each receive an unrestricted cash award of \$250,000.

Artist ***vanessa german***'s assemblage sculpture, installations, spoken-word poetry and community-based work confront racism, violence, homophobia and hate, while also expressing hope for healing. A self-described "citizen artist," she builds her sculptures from everyday objects—cowrie shells, beads, mirrors, vintage figurines, toy weapons—transforming them into power figures that acknowledge collective suffering while also offering affirmation and optimism.

With a strong focus on the female form, Ms. *german*'s sculptures often bring visual language to the pain of injustice and imbue her subjects with strength, such as her artwork, [GLORY](#). Recent exhibitions include her solo show [Sad Rapper](#) (2022) with the Kasmin Gallery in New York and [Reckoning: Grief and Light](#) (2021) at the Frick Pittsburgh, the latter consisting of altarpieces for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain and others who died in police shootings. Set to music and presented alongside the museum's Italian Renaissance devotional paintings, *Reckoning: Grief and Light*, is a gripping meditation that offers viewers a place to reflect and grieve. A new exhibition, *vanessa german—THE RAREST BLACK WOMAN ON THE PLANET EARTH*, will be on view at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum from October 2022 through May 2023.

Her 2019 traveling exhibition, [Miracles and Glory Abound](#), was exhibited in juxtaposition with one of America's most well-known paintings: Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851). In Ms. *german*'s work, the boat is powered by female figures who paddle with crutches, with one of her intrepid power figures marching ahead, pulling the boat in her wake.

"I believe in the power of art. This is love for me," says Ms. *german*. "Creativity saved my life, so, I know deeply, intimately, that creativity is a sure force of power—and, everything that I make inhabits this power. I am always asking the work to be full of power, to DO, to be directed with purpose beyond my capacity to authorize. I want people to feel the work, for the work to enter into their living places, for it to awaken their own spaces of power, creativity and hope."

In 2011, Ms. *german* founded Love Front Porch to provide space for collective healing and creative expression for her neighbors in Homewood, a Pittsburgh community acutely affected by disinvestment. As an unexpected outcome that arose after moving her work onto her porch when her basement studio could no longer accommodate her growing sculptures, the project later relocated to a house purchased next door. Renamed [ARThouse](#), it provided art supplies and open studio space for children and adults, as well as an artist residency program, outdoor theater and community garden until a fire in February 2021

caused serious structural damage to the home. The ARThouse is currently being rebuilt and Ms. German hopes to transition it to an artist residency space when it's completed.

“Vanessa is honored for her generosity as an artist and for her important, socially relevant work, in which she elevates art to its most powerful and original purpose: to foster greater strength and healing,” says Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “The Heinz Awards recognize the artists and creators who help us better understand the challenges of our culture. Vanessa's bold, thought-provoking sculptures, together with her community-based programs, clearly reflect that spirit, demonstrating not only a commitment to artistic excellence, but also to work that enfolds viewers into an experience that is both confronting and healing.”

Interdisciplinary artist and educator **Cauleen Smith** is recognized for her experimental films, installations and multimedia works that push the boundaries of film, blending moving images with painting, textiles and more to create immersive experiences. Drawing from structuralism, Third World Cinema and science fiction, Ms. Smith's work reflects on history and the power of community and culture.

Ms. Smith's work in the [2017 Whitney Biennial](#), *In the Wake*, incorporated textile banners stitched with text such as “I'm so black that I blind you” on one side. Symbols signifying the urgent need to be heard in a time of struggle are stitched on the opposite side of the banners, which were also carried in a musical procession through the streets of New York. *In the Wake* is a reference to Christina Sharpe's book of the same title, which explores representations of Black life across artistic mediums and in popular culture.

*Give It or Leave It*, a traveling exhibition that synthesizes Ms. Smith's varied approach to artmaking, completed its final run in [2021 at LACMA](#). The exhibition weaves together happenings and sites associated with figures of importance to Ms. Smith including, as outlined in the exhibition text, Alice Coltrane and her ashram, a 1966 photo shoot by Bill Ray at Simon Rodia's Watts Towers, Noah Purifoy and his desert assemblages, abolitionist Sojourner Truth and Black spiritualist Rebecca Cox Jackson and her Shaker community. These sites and figures are highlighted in films such as [Pilgrim](#) (2017) and [Sojourner](#) (2018). In her wallpaper design, *Space Station Chinoiserie #1: Take Hold of the Cloud* (2018), she again combines these spaces and individuals in a repeating motif. These works were woven throughout multiple galleries, along with disco balls, banners, carefully curated objects and lighting.

Ms. Smith's *COVID Manifesto*—a series of videos showing her hands writing personal reflections and calls to action in response to the pandemic as well as the myriad social injustices of 2020—was initially shared on [her Instagram account](#) during the first wave of lockdowns. The series was later [presented on screen at the Piccadilly Lights](#) in London, and onsite and online at the [Carnegie Museum of Art](#).

“Everything I make is just an offering. I think of my work as a contribution to the histories of the Black diasporas and our powers of invention, survival and generativity,” says Ms. Smith. “I want all the rough edges and jerry-rigged solutions to remain in my work because the process of making anything should not be mysterious or magical. It's like the difference between a rough piece of jasper pulled from a riverbed and a polished jasper gem. Both are beautiful, but the rough rock tells you where it's from, where it wants to be. That said, the people in my films, while always gorgeous, really resist the gaze, and give very little. I want the viewer to be aware that they cannot know everything. But I hope there's another kind of generosity that is felt and received: The spirit of studying, thinking, imagining together and a reckoning with our histories that helps guide our futures.”

Most recently, Ms. Smith's 2014 film, *H-E-L-L-O*, was screened in [2022 at Collective in Edinburgh](#). Originally a commission for a live procession in New Orleans, she instead highlighted the city's

overlooked or now-buried historic sites. The work is a sequence of local musicians—each at a different site in the city and playing a different bass clef instrument—repeating the same five notes that make up the coded aural greeting from space in Steven Spielberg’s 1977 sci-fi movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

In 2023, *Musical Thinking*, her work exploring the powerful resonances between recent video art and popular music, will be exhibited at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

“One of the most noted experimental Black filmmakers of our time, Cauleen creates deep, imaginative experiences that shed sharp light on societal issues and conditions that are in urgent need of change,” says Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “We honor Cauleen for her brilliant, immersive body of work that reflects on our history, the power of community and culture and the possibility of a more compassionate future. As an artist, Cauleen is expanding our view of the world, a quality that beautifully reflects the spirit of the Heinz Awards.”

Created to honor the memory of the late U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards celebrate excellence and achievement in areas of great importance to Senator Heinz. The 27<sup>th</sup> awards bring the total number of recipients to 165 and reflect more than \$30 million in awards given since the program was launched in 1993.

**Additional recipients by category are:**

**Economy (shared award): Hilary A. Abell, Co-Founder, Project Equity, Guerneville, Calif., and Alison Lingane, Co-Founder, Project Equity, Oakland, Calif.,** are leaders in the movement to advance employee ownership as an exit strategy for business owners, and as a proven approach for increasing employee engagement, satisfaction and economic well-being. Project Equity provides hands-on consulting and support to companies that want to transition to employee ownership while partnering with city and state governments and federal agencies to advance awareness, uptake and financing.

**Economy: Chrystal A. Cornelius, President and CEO, Oweesta Corporation, Longmont, Colo.,** works to return wealth to Native lands and people, addressing centuries of disenfranchisement that have led to profound socioeconomic disparities for Native communities. A community development financial institution (CDFI) intermediary, Oweesta provides financial products and development services exclusively to Native CDFIs and Native communities to help residents repair their credit, open new businesses and obtain assistance for home down payments.

**Environment: Anne C. Evens, Ph.D., CEO, Elevate, Chicago, Ill.,** works to ensure equal access to climate solutions that provide clean and affordable heat, power and water in homes and communities. Elevate champions energy efficiency improvements in affordable housing and manages programs that advance renewable energy, water conservation, lead abatement and indoor air quality, primarily in multifamily buildings.

**Environment: Rhett Ayers Butler, Founder and CEO, Mongabay.org, Menlo Park, Calif.,** leads the global environmental science and conservation news platform Mongabay, which produces original reporting in 10 languages by over 800 correspondents across the world. Mongabay produces meticulously researched, evidence-based news and investigative pieces, and is a trusted source giving voice and agency to frontline communities and ecosystems facing threats from development and deforestation.

Recipients of the 27<sup>th</sup> Heinz Awards will be honored at a virtual event on October 25, 2022. For more information on the awardees, visit [www.heinzawards.org](http://www.heinzawards.org).

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

###

**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 celebrate 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](http://www.heinzawards.org).

Contacts:        Maya Brod  
                      301-467-4917 / [mbrod@burness.com](mailto:mbrod@burness.com)  
                      Kim O’Dell  
                      412-497-5786 / [kodell@heinzoffice.org](mailto:kodell@heinzoffice.org)