The 2017 Guggenheim Photography Fellows: Continuing a Tradition of Greatness

In 1925, United States Senator and industrial scion Simon Guggenheim, along with his wife and partner Olga Guggenheim turned a profound personal tragedy into extraordinary opportunity. Two years earlier, their eldest son John died unexpectedly as he prepared to leave home for college. The couple later endowed the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation to honor the promise embodied in a life cut short. In the nine decades that have since passed, the Foundation has awarded more than 15,500 fellowships in fields ranging from African Studies to Genetics to Photography.

Announced in April, the twelve photographers in the 2017 cohort join an illustrious group from the past century including Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, Roy DeCarava, Diane Arbus, Dawoud Bey, Rachel Sussman, Latoya Ruby-Frazier and An-My Le.

Roula Seikaly asked a selection of this year’s Fellows to share examples of the work for which they were recognized, and their thoughts about receiving an award that has the potential to change the path of their life and career. A few of the winners were unable to participate, so we’ve included links to their work at the end of this feature.

Congratulations to all!
Marina Berio’s expansive practice has produced series that capture the visceral materiality of the
photographic print, and the surreal discomfort of traveling throughout the West Bank. For the space in the mind in the body in the space, Berio considers her studio walls as a productive meeting point for mind, body, and physical space.

© Marina Berio

Roula Seikaly: What excites you most about being a Fellow?

Marina Berio: The recognition and validation are wonderful, but the best thing about being recognized with this honor is that I will be able to take a year off from my job, which is a position of fairly high responsibility and visibility. I plan to fully immerse myself in my own work in a way that is simply not possible when I have those commitments. I’ve been to several residencies for periods of between two weeks and two months, but I’ve never experienced the luxury of having a whole
Daniel Coburn

The Hereditary State, Daniel Coburn’s deeply personal long form project, takes up the family photo album as a site of conflicting narratives. Such images collections often highlight a family’s joy, accomplishments, and time spent in each other’s company. Rarely are the darkest or most difficult personal interactions memorialized in album form, a concern that Coburn aligns with failing narratives of the American Dream. This series engages Coburn and his family members in moments that are by turns vulnerable, revelatory, and mundane.
Seikaly: Tell us a bit about your practice. What’s exciting you about making art right now?  
Coburn: I love making pictures of people. This is a passion that I will concentrate on over the next year. My work challenges the conventionality of the family photo album, and unveils the dark undercurrents of my family history. I do not come from a family that is conventional and I have never led a conventional life. At this time, I am assembling my own personal album—one that reflects my values and reveals the complicated lives of the people that I love. This new album will also reflect the anxiety I feel in relationship to our current social and political predicament. I hope that these photographs inspire important conversations about issues that are often suppressed in traditional family albums. This work presents challenging ideas that often defy social constructs. The Guggenheim Fellowship will provide the resources necessary for me to deliver this project to a public.
Ken Gonzales-Day

Ken Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynchings* was born of anti-immigration rhetoric and an uptick in vigilante violence along the US-Mexico border in 2002. Visually alluring, yet chilling, the series addresses the historical erasure of Latinos from historical accounts of lynching. By removing the victim and rope from each image, the artist directs our attention away from the crime’s lurid spectatorial scene and toward the social mechanism of lynching itself.

© Ken Gonzales-Day

Seikaly: What excites you most about being a Fellow?

Gonzales-Day: It has been a dream of mine for as long as I can remember, and I think I first got most excited reading about Edward Weston and his Guggenheim award at the age of 51. With it he bought an old jalopy and drove around the American West in 1937 and 1938. Back then, it was only six thousand dollars and described really just living off those funds for a whole year.
At first glance, Michael Lundgren’s work could be perceived as an accomplished addition to the canon of landscape photography. Closer attention reveals that his passion lies in capturing surreal or supernatural elements of the world around us. The series *Matter* reveals an unfamiliar, potentially threatening world where dislocated cement cubes are found in the desert, and the remains of a green fox are unearthed. His practice involves both digital and analog technologies, through which he manipulates images through the camera, darkroom, and the computer.
Seikaly: What's the first thing you're going to do with the funding?

Lundgren: Lately I make my photographs in both remote and occupied landscapes, and I'm thrilled to be embarking on the first journey of my Fellowship this summer to the Yucatan peninsula. I'll be driving from Arizona to the southern tip of Mexico, making work along the way.
Amanda Means

Acknowledged by the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for the series *Folded & Crushed*, Amanda Means describes her desire to interact directly with the photographic process and what it produces. Instead of maintaining the purity of the print surface, she exploits the physicality of the image by folding, refolding, and crushing the prints before the emulsion sets. The results are dense abstract compositions that resemble work of Jackson Pollack.
Seikaly: What’s the first thing you’re going to do with the funding?
Means: There’s not one thing that is first on the list. It is a wonderful support and encouragement to my ongoing explorations in photography. It will help alleviate some of the essential financial exigencies of both my studio and darkroom maintenance expenses and allow me more time to further delve into the new photographic drawings I am involved with.

Shaun O’Boyle
Shaun O’Boyle photographs locations where culture and history have influenced infrastructure and architectural presence on the land. In late 2015, he participated in the National Science Foundation’s Antarctic Artists and Writers program where he photographed the built environment as it supports international scientific projects and the communities who pursue them. By this measure, architecture on a continent nearly devoid of human history becomes a measure of memory and scientific experimentation.
Seikaly: Tell us a bit about your practice. What’s exciting you about making art right now?

O’Boyle: This project is looking at the capacity of architecture and the landscape to engage history and narrative, how studies of the landscape can reveal hidden artifacts - objects and places which weave together submerged stories and carry forward narratives which shape or reshape our experience in the present. They frame events and pose possibilities about how history can be seen. In high latitude locations especially, because there is so little visual distraction, time renders the landscapes with the lines and shading of huts and ruins, generations of activities revealed through fragments of habitation. There is an immediacy and presence to these constructions, they become a stage onto which stories and daydreams can be projected. The Arctic part of this project will explore a more varied landscape with a more dynamic history, from early exploration and science to hunting and mining. I hope to take the project to other areas of the Arctic where native cultures are still living.
Maggie Steber is a veteran documentary photographer who has worked for more than thirty years to capture humanistic stories of people and cultures worldwide. The thrust of that work is
capturing how people and cultures are perceived in comparison to how they imagine themselves. The Secret Garden of Lily LaPalma, the series for which she was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship, envisions Steber as Lily, dark alter ego at play in an alternative world. Through this work, Steber examines her imagination as it is impacted by personal experiences.
Seikaly: What excites you most about being a Fellow?

Steber: More than anything, I am excited that the judges found merit in my work, enough so that they wanted to see how it might move forward. Now I can do the things with my work in extending it that I could not have done before. But I think it’s the belief by the judges that moved me the most.
Brad Temkin
Chicago-based artist Brad Temkin turns a trained eye on the landscape, particularly the marks of human intervention. For the series The State of Water, Temkin captures one of the planet’s most vital resources as it shapes urban life. Scenes of algae, sludge pools, and miles of conveyances including pipes and troughs are rendered as tight, abstract compositions.

Seikaly: Tell us a bit about your practice. What’s exciting you about making art right now?

Temkin: What has always excited me, and still does, is the process of making pictures. The pictures are simply “biscuits” that give me clarity. It is a privilege to be an artist and to share my vision of the
world. I am an optimist and believe that in spite of our folly, the world is a good place. My work reflects this; I hope in an eloquent way.

Editors: A few of the remaining 2017 Guggenheim fellows in Photography were unable to contribute to this piece, but we encourage you to further explore their inspiring work further by visiting their websites below:

Mary F. Calvert

Thilde Jensen

Leigh Ledare

Zoe Strauss

Newer: New Photography Exhibition Addresses Dislocation in The United States

Older: Chris Maggio’s Photographs of Midtown Manhattan are Hot as Hell

World

Founded in 2005, Humble Arts Foundation is a 501c3 dedicated to supporting and promoting new art photography.