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## ARTINFO

NEWS

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Teresita Fernández

### IN THE NEWS: Teresita Fernández

NEW YORK - Miami born, New York based artist Teresita Fernández is one of the 25 fellows awarded the prestigious MacArthur 'genius' grant this year. The five year grant — awarded to "individuals who show exceptional merit and promise for continued and enhanced creative work" — is considered one of the most prestigious awards in the US, in terms of both public perception and its half-a-million dollar stipend.

Fernandez, 37, is described by the MacArthur Foundation as an artist "integrating architecture and the optical effects of color and light into exquisitely constructed, contemplative spaces." Along with the other fine artist awarded the grant this year — painter Julie Mehretu — are a rare book preservationist, a biochemist, a molecular biologist, and a lobsterman, among others.

The news comes at an already dynamic time for Fernández. She had her first New York solo show in two and a half years last April, which met with great critical response. She was just the subject of an exhibition at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga, has an upcoming show at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia (opening October 7), and received a commission for the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle.

**The MacArthur grant is obviously one the most prestigious awards in the country; how do you feel about the spirit of the grant, and the combination of arts, science and literature it represents?**

It's just a real honor. I have a great deal of respect for what the MacArthur Foundation does all around. There's such an integrity to how they give their money away. I mean, not that many places do that anymore, number one, but the nature, the integrity, with which they give it away is also really important. It's not just that they have a bunch of money and they're giving it away. The things that they do outside of the MacArthur Fellowship are also highly regarded. It's just such an honor to be in such company. I was totally surprised and really caught off guard.

**So where were you when got the phone call?**

I got a phone call and then a letter today. My studio is right next to my home, so I happened to be in the house part. I was just totally, totally caught off guard. What's nice about it is it's such a huge honor, but there's no hype about it, you know. The way they go about it is so discreet, and it's not an impulsive thing, I don't think. I've had people call and congratulate me today that said they wrote letters for me in 1999. That they had a file on me for that long...that they really sort of watch somebody over a long period of time makes it even sort of more significant I think.

**There always seem to be interesting pairings between the arts and science honorees; this year, with you and Julie Mehretu, it seems they're continuing to expand what they look towards. What do you think of the choices?**

Someone like Julie for example, I have a great deal of respect for, I admire her work. I feel like the MacArthur choices this year are not obvious choices. They're not the names that are out there in lights every single day, the art/fashion-world names, let's say. I think it's people who are just really working at it. And working quietly, just kind of plugging away, and who are very serious about what they do, even though they may have a little less of a glamorous edge, let's say. And that to me, quite frankly, is a compliment. Because I have been working really diligently, but quietly, over the last five years. It's nice when somebody notices. I would've kept working the same way, but the fact that someone noticed, even though I may not be, you know, the most popular, most visible artist in the world, is a real compliment. I think they really do their homework. I don't think it's an impulsive sort of thing, I really think they look at someone over a long period of time—like years and years—and kind build a file on them, from what I gather. So I'm so pleased to be in the company that I'm in. I'm really happy for Julie too. To me, it's a great compliment to be in her company as well, because I think she's somebody who hasn't sort of bought into the whole art-world thing, but who is really concerned about her work and being an artist, and works very seriously. And I'd like to think that's the way they felt about me as well.

**Besides Mehretu, you're paired with, among others: a rare book preservationist, chemists, and a lobster fisherman.**

The lobster fisherman was my personal favorite. I think the science people and the writers were not obvious choices either. I think they made some really interesting choices, and I like that. Not everyone is someone whose name is up in lights all the time. Just everyday, kind of regular people who are really very, very dedicated to what they do.

**The stipend famously carries no restrictions; people must not be able to resist asking "what are you planning to do with the money?"**

I've gotten that question a lot.... First of all, you don't get it in one big lump...you get it over five years, so it's a reality check, ultimately. But you know, it offers me so much freedom, and it takes a lot of pressure off. I live off of my work, so this is what I make a living from as well, so it's really nice to just have the peace of mind of knowing that I could put more time into research and to

to culminate to meet a particular deadline or a particular show—just the idea of not showing for a year and just really developing something new. I'm going to keep doing exactly what I've been doing, but it does take an enormous amount of pressure off the kind of pressure you put on yourself too, of feeling like you have to have a show every so often, every year, or every two years. So I'm not going to do one thing with it. In general, it will just go to a bit more research and development, and being able to develop maybe more ambitious projects.