

Art World

Here Are the 10 Female Artists Over 40 Who Won This Year's \$25,000 'Anonymous Was A Woman' Grants

The buzzy award, with a commitment to celebrating the voices of women, went to Diane Simpson, Torkwase Dyson, and others.

Caroline Elbaor, November 21, 2019



Rhodesa Jones, *The Medea Project in BIRTHRIGHT?* a performance, in collaboration with Planned Parenthood of Northern California. Photograph by David Wilson, courtesy the artist.

Anonymous Was A Woman (AWAW), the grant program which champions women artists over 40, has announced the ten recipients of its 2019 awards, with Elia Alba, Torkwase Dyson, Amie Seigel, Marsha Cottrell, and Diane Simpson amongst the winners. Each artist, whose ages range from 45 to 84, will receive an unrestricted, Òno strings attachedÓ grant of \$25,000 to support the continued development of their practices.

Though AWAW has existed since 1996Ñhaving awarded over \$6 million to 240 women artists since its inceptionÑthe award experienced a significant bump in attention over the past year when philanthropist [Susan Unterberg stepped out as its previously anonymous founder and sole patron](#) in July 2018. This reveal pushed the AWAW grant into the spotlight for its 2019 cycle, with the program reporting a noteworthy surge in the number of both nominations and nominators, in addition to the implementation of a new public programming initiative focused on Òthe vitality of womenÓs voices.Ó

2019Ós winners work across painting, installation, performance, photography, and film. A uniting theme amongst the ten women appears to be a commitment to challenging traditional notions of art by experimenting with the merging of mediums; all of the grantees are self-described multimedia artists.

This yearÓs list also reflects a renewed interest in what might be considered social-practice art, as seen through the multifaceted practices of Rhodessa Jones and Elia Alba. Bay area-based Jones works as Director of the Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women and HIV Circle, a performance workshop designed for women living with the virus or living in prison. Alba, meanwhile, has become known in part for regularly organizing ÒThe Supper ClubÓ in New York City, a project in which she invites artists of color to share a meal while discussing visual culture. Those conversations are recorded and transcribed, and Alba takes photographs of each attendee for an ongoing portrait series.

In describing the Anonymous Was A Woman vision, Unterberg emphasizes gender disparities in the art market [as well as in museum programming](#), saying such a persistent imbalance Ògalvanizes our mission and our commitment to celebrating the voices of women.Ó The award is also about building community; indeed, 2019Ós grantees formed a group e-mail correspondence among themselves and AWAW within 24 hours of the announcement. ÒThe sense of honor to be amongst one another and part of such a wonderful genealogy of women artists was quite palpable,Ó artist Amie Siegel said to Artnet News.

ÒI was sitting in my studio when I received the call,Ó Siegel said, recalling how she received news of her win. ÒOnce Susan Unterberg identified herself, my heart started racing. I knew exactly who she was and felt both incredibly moved and a bit in awe when she told me I was a recipient.Ó

ÒOne of the sweet ironies of the award is that the giver for so long remained anonymous, saying the award isnÓt about her, but it existed to make so many women artists the opposite of anonymous, to make them visible,Ó Siegel concluded.

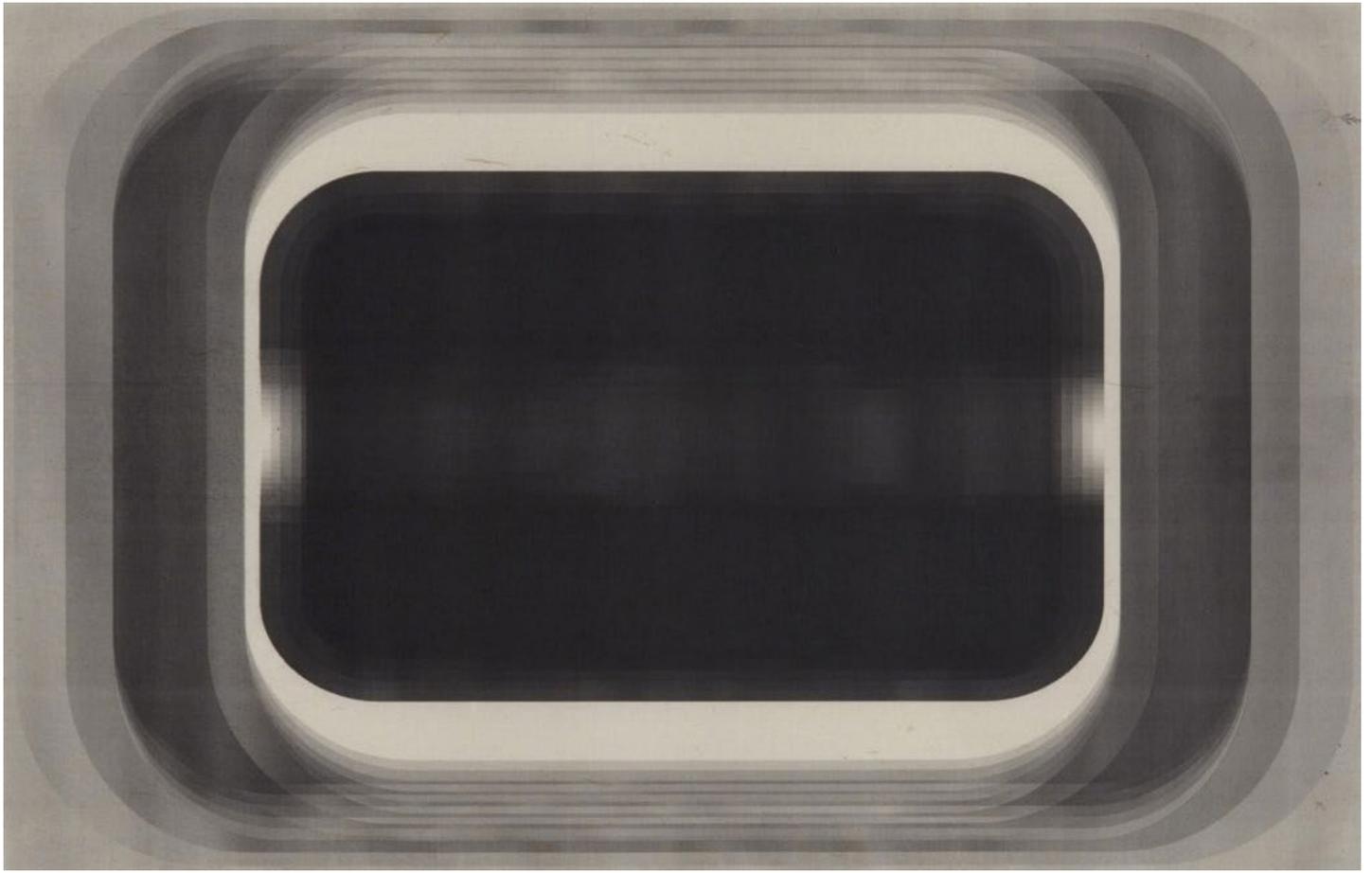
The full list of 2019 award recipients is below, followed by examples of their work.

Elia Alba, 57

Marsha Cottrell, 55

Torkwase Dyson, 46

Heide Fasnacht, 68



Marsha Cottrell, Aperture Series (40), 2016. Laser toner on paper. Courtesy the artist.