

Finkel, Jori. "Allen Ruppertsberg and John Outterbridge among 50 new USA fellows." *Los Angeles Times* (Culture Monster), 5 December 2011.



The holidays have come early for dozens of writers, dancers, musicians, filmmakers and other artists across the country. United States Artists has just announced the recipients of its annual grants: 50 artists (or artist teams), each receiving no-strings-attached grants of \$50,000. This year five of the 50 so-called USA fellows are based in Southern California. The formally inventive, technologically savvy L.A. architect Elena Manfredini received one of the grants in the category of architecture/design. Long Beach independent filmmaker Dee Rees, who loosely based the upcoming movie "Pariah" on her experience growing up gay in a religious black family, won in the category of media. Nancy Keystone, a playwright and founder of Critical Mass Performance group in L.A., won in the category of theater. And the region had two winners in visual art: assemblage artist John Outterbridge of Los Angeles, an instrumental figure in the Watts arts scene, and conceptual artist Allen Ruppertsberg of Santa Monica, who once described himself as a cultural "flaneur" for his wide-ranging, mass media-inspired practice. (Other categories include craft and traditional arts, dance, music and literature.)

Outterbridge, 78, and Ruppertsberg, 67, are among the oldest recipients this time. They have also been recognized this year by several Pacific Standard Time exhibitions designed to showcase pioneers of the Southern California art scene.

United States Artists Executive Director Katharine DeShaw calls the Pacific Standard Time connection a happy coincidence. "If you look at the full list of winners, a lot of these artists are very, very talented and have been very important mentors for next generations, but have in the past gone under-recognized. I am delighted we can celebrate them."

She said recipients were actually told of their awards earlier this fall but were asked to keep quiet. "We tell them the good news, then of course we torture them by saying you can only tell one person. We learned that from the MacArthur ["genius" grant] people. If they can't tell anyone at all, they will go out of their minds."

Compared with the MacArthur or Guggenheim foundations, United States Artists is a toddler in the field of cultural philanthropy. But since its founding in 2006, it has raised a total of \$15 million for its annual grants, plus \$1.4 million through a micro-philanthropy website where artists make direct pitches to visitors to fund specific projects.

Actor/director Tim Robbins is hosting an awards ceremony Monday night at the Broad Stage in Santa Monica to celebrate the 2011 fellows. He explained his involvement to Culture Monster by email with the following statement:

"At a time when arts funding across the country is being cut to the bone, it's inspiring to know that United States Artists is there giving 50 artists a year grants of \$50,000 each. These grants provide artists with the funding that is necessary to create innovative and groundbreaking works of art. At The Actor's Gang we have had the privilege of working with three USA fellows: lighting designer Jennifer Tipton and directors Bill Rausch and Dominique Serrand. I look forward to meeting this year's winners and seeing where the generosity of United States Artists and its supporters will take them."