



BELLE FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES 2013 GRANTS

Jessica Dickinson

Visual Arts

New York, New York

Jessica Dickinson uses painting, drawing and abstraction as markers of a space outside the verbal and within the visible. Her paintings are created through numerous layers and erasures of oil painting, sanding, staining and cutting into a plaster-like ground. A recent gallery exhibit described her decelerated works as having the feeling of exposed surfaces moving through different states, where matter asserts itself as something impenetrable, while at the same time vulnerable.

“Jessica has a quiet, spiritual nature to her work; she creates work that has meaning and depth.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Mauro Ffortissimo

Music

Half Moon Bay, California

Mauro Ffortissimo, an artist and musician, has a mission to place a dozen pianos along a 25-mile stretch of pristine California coastline. The neglected pianos were rescued from all over the Bay Area, fixed and tuned, and muscled onto mountains, bluffs and beaches by a crew of five. World-class musicians, dilettantes and dreamers have played for themselves, their friends, passing children, dogs, pelicans, dolphins and whales. Inspired and sometimes brilliant performances were filmed and recorded in these idyllic settings. Mr. Ffortissimo is working to make a film, *Twelve Pianos*, about this journey.

“Mauro is an artist who travels the world, listening to music of diverse cultures and then finding ways to integrate art and music into our community.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Adam Fong

Music

San Francisco, California

A tremendously talented composer, Adam Fong has composed for voice, violin, flute, piano and guitar. His work as a composer is impressive, but his vision and tireless commitment to building up the experimental and new music community is stellar. In 2012, he started the Center of New Music in San Francisco. Mr. Fong is that very rare person who has the artist’s ability to turn inward to find the visions that give expression to his soul, and the producer’s ingenuity to lead others to create new work — and even a new home.

“His work has the capacity to startle and surprise but in the next moment, to utterly seduce.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Tianbi Johnson

Visual Arts

Ventura, California

Tianbi Johnson is not a raucous or extroverted person, and when it comes to voicing her opinion, her voice is definitely not the loudest. Her art is her voice. It can be firm and strongly worded or soft and gentle. Being an artist is not just what this young girl wants to be when she is older, it is part of her character and how she defines herself. Ms. Johnson was born in Lichuan, Jiangxi Province, China. Adopted at 8 months by her single mother, she is now a junior at Ventura High School where she draws and paints and dreams of a future filled with creativity.

“Tia does not yet know where her art career will take her; she only knows that it is her future.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Wendy Kirbey

Art Activism

Albany, Oregon

The daughter of an Oregon logger, Wendy Kirbey saw her community suffer economically with the decline of the timber industry. She decided to take a risk and propose building a Victorian-style carousel that would attract visitors and tourism. The carousel animals would be hand-carved by Albany volunteers. Ms. Kirbey's courage and tenacity enabled the inception of her grand vision with only \$150 and a few volunteer believers. Today, 10 years later, hundreds of volunteers have spent thousands of hours turning her crazy idea into 52 profoundly beautiful hand sculpted whimsical creatures. Her project has become the Historic Carousel and Museum of Albany, Oregon.

“She is a visionary with a strong work ethic who knows how to motivate followers for a remarkable cause by utilizing innumerable human talents.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Luis Muñoz

Music

Santa Barbara, California

Luis Muñoz is not only a musician, but he is also an accomplished composer, arranger and percussionist. Born in Costa Rica, Mr. Muñoz immigrated to the U.S. in 1974 but has kept his foot in both the U.S. and Central America over his many years in this industry. His music transforms and haunts. Form and genre are enveloped brilliantly as a spectrum fed by an enlightened blend of instruments and groupings of musicians. He uses Latin Jazz as an emotional tool that helps our understanding and appreciation of other cultures and can serve to bring us together regardless of our political, socioeconomic or philosophical beliefs.

“The world needs more artists of this caliber and passion. Individuals who are able to bridge the international waters through music are a vital component of humanity.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Samuel Rodriguez

Visual Arts

San José, California

Samuel Rodriguez is an emerging artist who works in various mediums including design, walls, paintings and drawing. He has a strong interest in topographical portraiture that is inspired by social, historic and cultural hybridity. His thirst for new endeavors and new ways of thinking and looking at art, community and life is tremendous. Mr. Rodriguez truly believes art should be for everyone and that given technology, art no longer needs to be centered nor created in what were traditionally “art hubs” such as New York, Los Angeles or London.

“He has the energy and ability to work across various mediums and to collaborate with other individuals as well as large entities.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Yori Seeger

Sculpture

Ben Lomond, California

Yori Seeger has established himself as one of the significant emerging artists of California in the span of just a few years. His sculptures deal primarily with the figure and are often disjointed, fragmented and abstracted. The Triton Museum of Art says these figures are “not so much individuals, [but] represent the fate of entire cultures when we lose sight of our individual compassion. They are the macrocosm of humanity reflected in the microcosm of the fragile yet surviving human.” In addition, Mr. Seeger also is a teacher who runs the bronze foundry at West Valley College. One of his goals in 2014 is to start an art school and foundry — The School of Visual Philosophy.

“Regardless of the student's age, level of experience or quality of work, he engaged all the students as artists and inspired literally dozens of new sculptors in the Bay Area.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Lynn Talbot
Visual Arts
Brooklyn, New York

Lynn Talbot has brought still life paintings back into fashion by adding abstraction and words into her work. Her still life technique recalls 16th and 17th century Spanish and Dutch painters and is combined with geometric shapes and patterning that creates a vivid and unique style. Her work is contemplative yet fun, which is a tricky balance to find. Ms. Talbot “is prolific but her work suffers not from quantity but from sheer and honest beauty.”

“Lynn is an excellent painter but she’s also raising important questions about art.”

— Belle Foundation scout

Sieglinde Van Damme
Photography/Videography
San José, California

Sieglinde Van Damme is a photographer and videographer who uses veiled imagery and a visual language based on ambiguity. Her work deals with the social management of identity. Not necessarily identity in the sense of “who am I,” but rather the investigation of “who can I be” given the inherent conditions of the so-called context we live in. Ms. Van Damme immigrated to the United States in 1998 and after nearly 15 years here, she considers herself a tourist in both places, her home country of Belgium and San José.

“I continue to be intrigued by her work, even though I can’t say that I understand it all.”

— Belle Foundation scout



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1. Adam Fong 2. Sieglinde Van Damme 3. Samuel Rodriguez 4. Lynn Talbot 5. Mauro Ffortissimo
 6. Jessica Dickinson 7. Tianbi Johnson 8. Luis Muñoz 9. Yori Seeger 10. Wendy Kirbey

The Belle Foundation for Cultural Development was established upon the belief that education, the arts and humanities are among the most vital elements of human civilization. The Belle Foundation acknowledges also that through the actions and achievements of individuals our culture not only continues to develop, but flourishes.

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