

Galerie

‘Anonymous Was a Woman’ Award Gives Major Boost to 10 Female Artists

Betty Tompkins, Dotty Attie, and Kate Gilmore were among this year's winners, receiving \$25,000 each

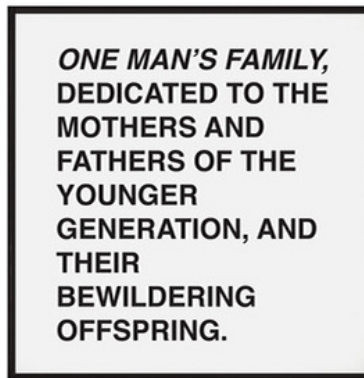
by COLLEEN CURRY

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The grant program Anonymous Was a Woman today awarded \$250,000 to ten female artists for significant contributions in their fields.

Women artists over the age of 40 qualify for the unrestricted \$25,000 grant, and recipients are selected by a committee of unidentified art writers, curators, and previous winners. The list of winners included Dotty Attie, María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Patty Chang, Beverly Fishman, Kate Gilmore, Heather Hart, Deborah Roberts, Rocio Rodríguez, Michèle Stephenson, and Betty Tompkins.

The recipients range in age from Kate Gilmore, 42, to Dotty Attie, who at age 80 has received considerable recognition, from work in the collections of the Whitney and MoMA to the less common distinction of having an all-female punk band named after her. Besides her small-scale paintings, Attie's claim to fame is A.I.R. Gallery, which she co-founded in 1971 as the only gallery in New York to exclusively show work by women.



Dotty Attie, *The Golden Age of Radio* (L), 2018. Oil on linen. Photo: Courtesy of the artist

But not every grantee already has an established legacy; on the contrary, past winners testify that the award gave them the means to continue making art when they might have otherwise given up. Two standout examples are Carrie Mae Weems and Amy Sherald, the latter of whom was on the verge of losing her studio when her check for \$25,000 arrived in the mail. Her grant money went directly toward painting former First Lady Michelle Obama for the National Portrait

Gallery, according to [The New York Times](#).

The name of the grant program refers to a line in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. For almost the entirety of its 22-year history, the founder of Anonymous Was a Woman was—fittingly—anonymous, only revealing her identity as the artist Susan Unterberg about five months ago. For years, Unterberg struggled to be taken seriously as a female artist in a male-dominated industry.

It's a generations-old challenge for women artists and intellectuals, many of whom are remembered by male pen names or not remembered at all. As Woolf wrote almost a century ago, "I would venture to guess that *Anon*, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman." Unterberg derived the name of her grant program from the paraphrased, popularized version of the above: "For most of history, Anonymous was a woman."

"I am delighted to, for the first time, personally and publicly congratulate this year's award recipients," Unterberg said in a statement. "I founded Anonymous Was a Woman to fill a void that I witnessed myself: support for women artists in the middle stages of their careers. I am thrilled to continue this mission by recognizing this year's group of remarkable women at a moment that there is heightened discussion about the vitality of women's voices."

The announcement of the reward recipients comes on the heels of several victories for women artists, including Charlotte Prodger's win of the prestigious [Turner Prize](#) (making her the third woman to win in a row) and a female-dominated fall art season, which included blockbuster exhibitions in New York featuring the work of Hilma af Klint and Sarah Lucas.