

Sanford Biggers and Tanya Aguiñiga win \$250,000 Heinz award

The prize recognizes the artists for their ‘unflinching’ examination of present-day issues

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Sanford Biggers.
Tanya Aguiñiga.

The artists Sanford Biggers and Tanya Aguiñiga are the recipients of the annual \$250,000 Heinz Awards, an unrestricted prize set up in 1993 by the family of the late Republican politician Henry John Heinz to recognise significant contributions to the arts, environmental and economic sectors.

The New York-based conceptual artist Sanford Biggers works across various media, creating works rooted in mythological and spiritual references. His works are often tied to themes related to the Black diaspora; in his retrospective at the Bronx Museum of the Arts last year, for example, the artist presented a series of sculptural paintings that amalgamated antique quilts, referencing the quilts that were used as signposts along the Underground Railroad to help enslaved people flee to free states. Earlier this year, he unveiled *the monumental bronze Oracle* (2020) at Rockefeller Plaza, a commanding sculpture that blends African and Greco-Roman influences.

The Los Angeles-based activist artist Tanya Aguiñiga, who was born and raised near the US-Mexico border in Tijuana, blends sculpture, performance and craft in her practice, creating works that spark dialogue around immigration and the ongoing border crisis. For the 2020 performance *Metabolising the Border*, the artist designed a bodysuit that incorporated remnants of the border wall, then walked the length of the wall for more than one hour.

Aguiñiga's works also emphasise community-building and collaboration. Between 2016 and 2018, the artist created *Ambos: Border Quipu/Quipu Fronterizo*, a cascading installation comprising a series of knotted pieces of fabric made with participants who were crossing the border. The work is reminiscent of a "quipu", or a method of record-keeping in ancient Incan and Andean cultures consisting of knotted textiles. Aguiñiga's next project involves a series of shrines installed along the border to honour the lives lost and separated there.

Teresa Heinz, the chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation, says Sanford creates works that are "visually and viscerally powerful as well as unflinching in their examination of the issues of our time", and that Aguiñiga "demonstrates both artistic excellence and a body work that is grounded in compassion for others, [and calls visitors to] learn and to make deeper connections with people whose lives and cultures are often misrepresented and unfamiliar".

The prize, now in its 26th edition, has awarded 158 recipients more than \$30m since it was launched. Some recipients in the non-arts category this year include Jacqueline C. Patterson, the founder and executive director of the Chisholm Legacy Project, a resource hub for Black climate justice leaders, and William J. Bynum, the chief executive of the Hope Policy Institute, which provides financial services for marginalised individuals. Prizes, Sanford Biggers