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FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS ANNOUNCES
2021 ELLSWORTH KELLY AWARD RECIPIENT

New York, NY, November 2, 2021 – Foundation for Contemporary Arts (FCA) is pleased to announce the 2021 recipient of The Ellsworth Kelly Award, a $40,000 annual grant created during Ellsworth Kelly’s lifetime and endowed by the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation to support museum exhibitions for contemporary artists. The recipient is the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) for the first major museum survey of Los Angeles performance artist Barbara T. Smith. Receiving critical attention primarily for her performance work, throughout her career Smith has also produced drawings, collage, prints, photographs, video, artists’ books, and sculpture. This historical survey will provide a panoramic view of Smith’s practice and contributions to contemporary art over the past five decades. The exhibition will be curated by ICA LA Senior Curator Jamillah James and opens in fall 2023.

The Ellsworth Kelly Award is a by-invitation, $40,000 annual grant to support a solo exhibition by an under-recognized, emerging, or mid-career contemporary visual artist at a regional U.S. art museum or university or college art gallery. The program and selection process are administered by FCA. Applications in this cycle were solicited from a small number of institutions west of the Missouri River. In 2022, applications from institutions east of the Missouri will be invited.

While Barbara T. Smith (b. 1931) has performed and exhibited throughout the U.S. and internationally, she remains lesser known outside of California. “Barbara T. Smith is a central figure in the history of performance art in and beyond Los Angeles and is influential to a generation of artists,” said ICA LA Senior Curator Jamillah James. “Her early embrace of new technologies at a time when these tools weren’t widely used or available is visionary and predicted much of contemporary artistic production. Further, her works in drawing, collage, and sculpture offer another entry into her extended meditation on gender, spirituality, and intimacy. We are excited to take a close look at Barbara’s practice in the many forms it has taken over the past fifty years and offer new entry points to her storied career.”

The ICA LA’s proposed exhibition of Barbara T. Smith was selected by FCA’s Board of Directors, including
Cecily Brown, Anne Collier, Anthony B. Creamer III, Jasper Johns, Jennie C. Jones, Julian Lethbridge, Dean Moss, Emily Wei Rales, James Welling, and John Yau. In selecting the award, FCA’s Directors seek projects that are in the earliest stages of planning at the time of review and require the financial catalyst provided by The Ellsworth Kelly Award to propel them from planning to realization. “The ICA LA’s bold vision for this exhibition speaks to Ellsworth Kelly’s longstanding commitment to supporting under-recognized artists,” said Kathleen Flynn, Interim Director of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. “FCA is pleased that the 2021 Ellsworth Kelly Award will assist in realizing the first major museum retrospective of Barbara T. Smith’s work.”

The inaugural Ellsworth Kelly Award (2016) was made to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) at the University of Pennsylvania, for Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It. Subsequent Ellsworth Kelly Awards include: The Mary S. Byrd Gallery of Art at Augusta University for Bojana Ginn: Phygital Muse (2018); the CCA Wattis Institute in San Francisco for Lydia Ourahmane: Solar Cry (2019); and the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) for dana washington-queen (2020).

About Barbara T. Smith
Barbara T. Smith (b. 1931) is an important figure in the history of feminist and performance art in Southern California. Her work—which spans media and often involves her own body—explores themes of sexuality, traditional gender roles, physical and spiritual sustenance, technology, communication, love, and death.

Smith received a BA from Pomona College in 1953, and an MFA in 1971 from the University of California, Irvine. There she met fellow artists Chris Burden and Nancy Buchanan, with whom she co-founded F-Space in Santa Ana, the experimental art space where many of her performances were staged.


About the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
The mission of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) is to support art that sparks the pleasure of discovery and challenges the way we see and experience the world, ourselves, and each other. ICA LA is committed to upending hierarchies of race, class, gender, and culture. Through exhibitions, education programs, and community partnerships, ICA LA fosters critique of the familiar and empathy with the different. Founded in 1984 as the Santa Monica Museum of Art (SMMoA) and reestablished in 2017 with a new identity and home in the burgeoning downtown Arts District, ICA LA builds upon a distinguished history of exhibitions and community programs. ICA LA is driven by a core ethos—to present work by emerging, mid-career, and historically under-recognized artists (often for the first time in Los Angeles); showcase and support local artists and thinkers; and introduce relevant and sometimes challenging new ideas into contemporary discourse.

About the Foundation for Contemporary Arts (FCA)
Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts was established in 1963 by John Cage (1912-1992) and Jasper Johns. At that time, some emerging visual artists were beginning to experience modest financial
success, while many of their peers working in dance, music, and theater struggled to find funding to present their work. Cage and Johns decided to organize a benefit exhibition at the Allan Stone Gallery to support their colleagues in the performance arts. Lee Bontecou, Elaine de Kooning, Willem de Kooning, Marcel Duchamp, Alex Katz, Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Marisol, Barnett Newman, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Frank Stella, Elaine Sturtevant, and Andy Warhol were among the 67 artists who contributed to this landmark show. With proceeds from the exhibition, the Foundation began making grants to individual artists.

Now known as the Foundation for Contemporary Arts (FCA), its mission is to encourage, sponsor, and promote innovative work in the arts created and presented by individuals, groups, and organizations. FCA’s unrestricted, by-nomination grants support pioneering work across the fields of dance, music/sound, performance art/theater, poetry, and the visual arts. Nearly 7,000 grants awarded to artists and arts organizations—totaling more than $23 million—have provided opportunities for creative exploration and development. To date, over 1,000 artists have made these grants possible by contributing paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, photographs, and videos to the sixteen benefit exhibitions held over the years.

www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org

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