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FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS ANNOUNCES 2022 ELLSWORTH KELLY AWARD RECIPIENT

New York, NY, July 11, 2022 – Foundation for Contemporary Arts (FCA) is pleased to announce the 2022 recipient of The Ellsworth Kelly Award, a $45,000 annual grant to an institution to support a solo exhibition of a contemporary visual artist. The recipient is the Frist Art Museum (FAM) in Nashville, Tennessee, and the award will assist in funding the first solo museum exhibition of Iranian-born artist Shahpour Pouyan in the United States. Encompassing a wide variety of media, Pouyan’s work uses the language of armaments and monumental architecture to confront and critique political power. Opening in the summer of 2024, the exhibition was conceived by FAM Senior Curator Trinita Kennedy as a triptych across three galleries—featuring a series of mixed media drawings, a large group of ceramic sculptures in architectural forms, and the debut of an immersive installation using virtual reality and climate control to evoke a fictional mosque.

Ellsworth Kelly recognized how transformative an in-depth solo exhibition could be for an artist’s career; as well as the role that U.S. regional museums and university and college art galleries play in creating such opportunities. This by-invitation, annual grant is intended to support an institution in providing this type of exhibition to an under-recognized, emerging, or mid-career artist. The program was created during Ellsworth Kelly’s lifetime and endowed by the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation; the selection process and award are administered by FCA. This year, the grant increased from $40,000 to $45,000. Applications in this cycle were solicited from a small number of institutions on the eastern side of the U.S.; in 2023, applications will be solicited from institutions in the western side of the country.

Both Pouyan and FAM see this exhibition as an opportunity to create cross-cultural dialogue. Iran and the United States have not had diplomatic relations since 1980, and in many American cities there are few opportunities to learn about Iranian culture. “Pouyan’s work is astonishing for its intense beauty, sophistication, and virtuosity,” said curator Trinita Kennedy. “While his art is political, Pouyan never announces his agenda, leaving the door open for dialogue and understanding.”

FAM’s proposed exhibition of Shahpour Pouyan 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, Matana Roberts, 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. “We are delighted that the 2022 Ellsworth Kelly Award will help bring such an ambitious and considered presentation of Shahpour Pouyan’s work to U.S. audiences,” said Kay Takeda, Executive Director of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. “The Frist Art Museum’s exhibition reflects Ellsworth Kelly’s belief in the transformative power of a museum exhibition for an artist—featuring Pouyan’s artistic concerns over three distinct and thematically connected projects, including the artist’s first virtual reality installation.”

The inaugural Ellsworth Kelly Award (2016) was made to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) at the University of Pennsylvania, for Caulen 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: حضرة شمسية، Solar Cry (2019); the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) for dana washington-queen (2020); and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) for Barbara T. Smith (2021).

About Shahpour Pouyan
Shahpour Pouyan (b. 1979) was born in Iran and currently lives in London. He uses historical events and conflicts as a metaphor to address the abusive relation of political power with religion, heritage, and the environment in today’s world. Architecture is one of the main elements of his visual vocabulary in addition to archaeology, armor, medieval art, and Persian painting. Encompassing a wide variety of media, Pouyan’s work transforms historical and political issues into poetic visual form.

The artist earned degrees in math and physics, philosophy, and painting in Tehran prior to receiving an MFA in New Forms and Integrated Practices from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY (2012).

Pouyan has participated in many group exhibitions and biennials, including: Strange Clay: Ceramics in Contemporary Art, Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre (London, UK, 2022–23); Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians, Asia Society Museum (New York, NY, 2021–22); Clapping with Stones: Art and Acts of Resistance, the Rubin Museum of Art (New York, NY, 2019–20); The Moon: A Voyage Through Time, the Aga Khan Museum (Toronto, Canada, 2019); Silk Road and World Civilizations, 7th Beijing International Art Biennale (2017); Iranian Voices, British Museum (London, UK, 2017); and Whorled Explorations, Kochi-Muziris Biennale (Kochi Island, India, 2014). Skyhigh Is My Place at the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens (Ghent, Belgium, 2021–22) was his first solo museum exhibition. Pouyan was shortlisted for the Jameel Prize 4 by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2016), and has received awards or fellowships from the Kenneth Armitage Foundation (2020), the Civitella Ranieri Foundation (2016), The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (2014), and the Cité internationale des arts (2007).

About the Frist Art Museum (FAM)
Since opening as the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in 2001, the Frist Art Museum has gained international recognition for its exhibitions and programs. FAM’s mission is to present and originate high-quality exhibitions with related educational programs and community engagement activities, and its vision is to inspire people through art to look at their world in new ways. A non-collecting institution, FAM programming includes international and national exhibitions, as well as shows devoted to regional and local artists. To bring the finest and most impactful art to Middle Tennessee, FAM’s leaders and curators have established collaborative working relationships with leading artists and institutions around the world. Education and community engagement are integral to FAM’s mission—through extensive regional partnerships, FAM creates meaningful experiences for all constituents in the Middle Tennessee community

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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. Early grantees include Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer, Philip Glass, Steven Reich, Meredith Monk and LaMonte Young. Organizations presenting and supporting innovative work, such as Judson Memorial Church, were also funded from 1993-2014.

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 to Artists recognize 20 artists each year with awards of $45,000 for their pioneering work across the fields of dance, music/sound, performance art/theater, poetry, and the visual arts. Its Emergency Grants provide urgent funding to approximately 200 artists annually to respond to sudden opportunities to present their work, or unexpected expenses for projects close to completion. Since FCA’s inception, over $24 million in grants have been awarded to artists and arts organizations. Of this amount, more than 3,500 grants totaling over $18.4 million have provided opportunities for creative exploration and the realization of new work, with another $5.6 million provided to 2,929 unique artists for COVID-19 relief in 2020-2021. To date, over 1,000 artists have made these grants possible by contributing paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, photographs, and videos to sixteen benefit exhibitions held over the years.

www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org

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