

Art

Three R.I. artists win coveted MacColl Johnson Fellowships

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Digitally manipulated photographs are the work of artist Annu Matthew, winner of a 2007 MacColl Johnson Fellowship.

Three Providence visual artists have just received a lot of encouragement: \$25,000 each.

Yizhak Elyashiv, Annu Matthew and Clifford Roelle are the winners of this year's MacColl Johnson Fellowships, the Rhode Island Foundation recently announced.

"The artists selected this year represent, in each case, work of the highest quality, and the fellowships will offer them a significant opportunity to further their artistic development," said Daniel Kertzner, the Foundation's community philanthropy officer. "They echo the value the MacColl Johnsons placed on the role of artists in the community."

The MacColl Johnson Fellowships are named for two Rhode Islanders who embraced the arts late in life. Margaret MacColl Johnson, who died in 1990, earned a degree in creative writing from Roger Williams University at age 70. Her husband, Robert MacColl Johnson, became a full-time painter after retiring from a career in the metalworking industry. When he died in 1999, he bequeathed \$1.2 million to the Rhode Island Foundation to make possible the fellowship program, which began in 2005, recognizing three musicians; followed the next year with three creative writers.

This year, the final year of a repeating three-year fellowship cycle, the recipients are visual artists: two who work in two dimensions, and one who works in three.

Elyashiv is a printmaker and a professor at the Rhode Island School of Design. He's working on a project about the impact of the Irish Famine in 1845 and, in his own words on his fellowship application, "documenting the relationship between landscape and memory."

This year, the Foundation received 165 applications, which were reviewed by a panel of five out-of-state judges.

"The panel noted the richness, complexity and beauty of Elyashiv's work and identified him as a seasoned professional," Kertzner said.

MATTHEW IS A photographer and an associate professor at the University of Rhode Island. She was born in England and raised in India. Her work focuses on the topic of immigration.

"I would like to add my voice to the growing debate by creating a dialogue about the new immigrant's experience," she wrote in her fellowship application.

Roelle is a sculptor and creates works with wire that he manipulates to evoke moods through often cartoon-looking characters. "My themes lead toward nostalgia and melancholy," he wrote in his application.

Among the places in Rhode Island where Roelle has exhibited his work are Firehouse 13, AS220 and The Space at Alice.

He has also had his work shown in Maryland and New York, and in the New York Times Magazine.

This year for the first time, the MacColl Johnson Fellowship recognizes four finalists: David Barnes of Newport, a painter; Joe Deal of Providence, a photographer; Ruth Dealy of Providence, a painter; and Jeffrey Silverthorne of Cranston, a photographer.

"We felt there were so many people whose work merited recognition from the committee," said Melanie Coon, a spokeswoman for the Foundation. "And there was such a strong sense among the panelists that they had a pool of incredible talent and they wanted to encourage artists."

The second three-year cycle for the MacColl Johnson Fellowships begins next year when the Foundation accepts applications from music composers.

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