

The MacDowell Colony

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

BETYE SAAR NAMED 2014 EDWARD MACDOWELL MEDAL WINNER

Public invited to take part as visual artist Betye Saar accepts award at The MacDowell Colony at August 10 event.

Peterborough, NH— The MacDowell Colony will award assemblage and installation artist Betye Saar with its 55th Edward MacDowell Medal on Sunday, August 10. The MacDowell Colony, the nation’s first artist residency program, has awarded the medal annually since 1960 to an individual artist who has made an outstanding contribution to his or her field.

Saar, who started as a printmaker, is perhaps best known for her intimate assemblages and collages, which not only challenge the myths and negative stereotypes ascribed to the African-American community but also demonstrate a connection with a myriad of mythic and spiritual concepts from Africa and the Caribbean. The artist, who eventually moved into working with found objects in larger-scale installations, joins an impressive list of past Medal recipients, including Robert Frost (1962), Georgia O’Keeffe (1972), Leonard Bernstein (1987), Louise Bourgeois (1990), Jasper Johns (1994), I.M. Pei (1998), Ellsworth Kelly (1999), and Stephen Sondheim (2013).

“Betye Saar has been a key influence in the dialogues around race and gender in the art world since the 1960s,” said Museum of Arts and Design Curator Lowery Stokes Sims, chairman of the Edward MacDowell Medal Selection Panel who will introduce Saar at the ceremony. “Her exquisite collages have posed questions, challenged presumptions, and have never failed to demonstrate her unique aesthetic sensibility. While her presence might be seen as primarily West Coast focused, through her participation in important exhibitions and solo presentations she has impacted a whole new generation nationally for whom polemics are a concern and shown them how to do it right.”

MacDowell Colony Chairman and author Michael Chabon said, “Betye Saar uses shards of myth and narrative, and found bits of history – with all its pain and magnificence – to build scale models of a world that is intensely personal and yet instantly, inescapably recognizable as our own broken world. These scale models of brokenness help us to interpret and find meaning in that world, mapping it with fierceness, a sense of play,

and the wild accuracy you find among the great cartographers and world-builders, also known as artists, whose explorations the MacDowell Colony has for so long striven to foster and sustain.”

The award will be presented to Saar in a public ceremony during the annual Medal Day celebration on Sunday, August 10, 2014, beginning at 12:15 p.m. at the MacDowell Colony grounds at 100 High Street in Peterborough, New Hampshire, which will be open to the public for the festivities and celebration. Following the award ceremony, guests can enjoy picnic lunches on Colony grounds by pre-ordering Medal Day picnic lunch baskets (available for sale at www.macdowellcolony.org) or by bringing their own. MacDowell artists-in-residence will open their studios beginning at 2:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m.

Joining Sims on the selection committee were visual artists Nene Humphrey and Richard Haas, Leslie King-Hammond, art historian and founder of the Center for Race and Culture at the Maryland Institute College of Art, and Susan Sollins-Brown, executive producer and curator of PBS's *Art in the Twenty-First Century*.

Chabon, also a MacDowell Fellow, will present the Edward MacDowell Medal along with Susan Davenport Austin, president of The MacDowell Colony Board of Directors, and Executive Director Cheryl Young, and Resident Director David Macy. The Edward MacDowell Medal is rotated among the artistic disciplines practiced at the artist colony established in Peterborough in 1907.

Born in 1926, Saar emerged as a leader in the redefinition of African American art in the 1960s and has continued to explore her cultural history in complex works inspired by a curiosity about the mystical. The breadth of her works over the last four decades reflects her interests in politics, race, religion, and gender as she has worked to “reach across the barriers of art and life, to bridge cultural diversities, and forge new understandings.”

“I’m not really well known, at least at the level of other MacDowell medalists,” Saar said. “And once I got over the shock, I was thrilled and of course honored.... I’m still a bit gaga over it.”

“Winning the Edward MacDowell medal has given me more confidence that I am on the right path,” she said. “And that is maybe telling me I have a karmic obligation to express how I feel about these [political, women’s rights, and spiritual] issues. It gives me a new push to explore how the ordinary can be transformed into the extraordinary.”

Saar said that she is of African, Irish, and Native American descent, “so I go off on many tangents, sort of like tangled roots,” explaining the numerous directions the materials she collects carry her. “I couldn’t march during the Civil Rights era as a mom, so I started collecting derogatory images and items and used them to express my anger and disappointment, and that’s how I got started.”

Saar has received numerous awards, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1974 and 1984, and the Getty Foundation in 1990. In 1994, she and John Outterbridge represented the

United States at the 22nd São Paulo Biennial. Her work is represented in numerous museum collections including the Detroit Institute of the Arts, High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Studio Museum in Harlem, and Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. As an indication of her stature in the art world she was featured in no less than 13 of the exhibitions that formed part of the 2012 Pacific Standard Time festival.

There is no charge to attend Medal Day. The MacDowell Colony is grateful for the support of our Medal Day corporate partners, Lincoln Financial Foundation and RiverStone Resources.

*Composer Edward MacDowell and pianist Marian MacDowell, his wife, founded The MacDowell Colony in 1907 to nurture the arts by offering creative individuals of the highest talent an inspiring environment in which to produce enduring works of the imagination. Situated on 450 acres of fields and woodland, MacDowell welcomes more than 275 architects, composers, filmmakers, interdisciplinary artists, theatre artists, visual artists, and writers from across the United States and around the globe each year. The sole criterion for acceptance is talent; a panel in each discipline selects Fellows. A registered National Historic Landmark, The MacDowell Colony was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1997. More than 7,000 artists have received Fellowships to work at MacDowell. These artists include **Milton Avery, James Baldwin, Ann Patchett, Leonard Bernstein, Glenn Ligon, and Wendy Wasserstein**. Pulitzer Prize-winning author **Michael Chabon** is the chairman of MacDowell's board of directors.*

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