

Information on Artists III: Special Focus Aging Artists

Research Center for Arts & Culture

Executive Summary

We face maturity with dread. As a society, we despise the old. Our misplaced pity erases the potential of the fastest growing and most experienced human force in the country.¹

As people live longer and the baby boomer generation enters retirement, there is increasing research on what gerontologists call “the possible” in successful aging. However, little is known about how artists age artistically, professionally, psychologically, and socio-economically. Without solid research, service organizations and agencies are inhibited from advocating for material support and policies that address the needs of aging artists, and the public is denied evidence that older artists can be a model for an aging society. While foundations and funders have long directed their largesse to support emerging and even mid-career artists, notably few are concerned with artists as they mature into old age. Results from our pioneering study, **Information on Artists III: Special Focus: New York City Aging Artists (2007)** show that visual artists age 62+ avoid traditional systems like retirement and exemplify a life-long commitment to and engagement with their art. The next phase of our study expands to include aging performing and literary artists, providing the first needs assessment of this population in the New York Metro Area and further positioning artists as an inspiration for successful aging.

The purpose of **IOA III: Aging** is to understand the needs and circumstances of artists as they age; how older artists are supported and integrated within their communities; and how their network structures change over time. Past evidence shows that as people age, they often become more isolated from each other, making it difficult for organizations to serve them as a group and posing challenges that artists may no longer be able to meet on their own. Such needs range from adequate healthcare and retirement savings to the loss of a community of colleagues, unrealized career expectations, and a stimulating environment where creative work can be nurtured at a time when many artists are maturing in their art.

Determined to put research into action, the RCAC has created interagency partnerships with organizations in both the arts (e.g. The New York Foundation for the Arts) and aging communities (e.g. The International Longevity Center, AARP) to ensure they can advocate and make change once our study is complete. The results of our work to date will be featured in the 2008 American Society on Aging Conference and the 2008 2nd National Conference on Creative Aging. For this phase of our study, we will collaborate with Actors’ Equity Association (which runs the Actors’ Home in Englewood, New Jersey), the American Guild of Musical Artists, the Actors’ Fund (instrumental in developing health care coverage and benefits for performing artists), the American Federation of Musicians, and continue our partnerships with borough arts councils, The New York Foundation for the Arts, Creative Aging, and Elders Share the Arts.

(Cont.)

PROJECT

Joan Jeffri
Director

Advisory Board

Theodore S. Berger
Project Director
Urban Arts Initiative, New York City
Executive Director, New York Creates

Robert N. Butler, M.D.
President & CEO
International Longevity Center

Charles C. Bergman
Chairman & CEO
The Pollock-Krasner Foundation

Kinshasha Holman Conwill
Deputy Director
National Museum of African
American History & Culture at the
Smithsonian Institute

Carmen DeLavallade
Actress, Dancer

Ronald Feldman
Director
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Douglas Heckathorn, PhD.
Special Consultant
Department of Sociology
Cornell University

Information on Artists III: Special Focus Aging Artists

Research Center for Arts & Culture

PROJECT

For over twenty years, the Research Center for Arts and Culture at Columbia University's Teachers College has collected information, testimonies and research on living artists. These studies have documented and updated the artist's situation in the United States over time in terms of health and life insurance, retirement plans, live/work space, education, earnings, and income from art². With aging artists, a groundbreaking idea warrants a groundbreaking methodology. Since 2000, we have worked with world-renowned sociologist Douglas Heckathorn from Cornell University and his social network method of reaching "hidden populations," of which artists are a prime example. This method yields important information that may remain undetected by other research methods to effectively identify and verify the needs and realities of aging artists.

Joan Jeffri
Director

Advisory Board

Theodore S. Berger
Project Director
Urban Arts Initiative, New York City
Executive Director, New York Creates

Robert N. Butler, M.D.
President & CEO
International Longevity Center

Charles C. Bergman
Chairman & CEO
The Pollock-Krasner Foundation

Kinshasha Holman Conwill
Deputy Director
National Museum of African
American History & Culture at the
Smithsonian Institute

Carmen DeLavallade
Actress, Dancer

Ronald Feldman
Director
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Douglas Heckathorn, PhD.
Special Consultant
Department of Sociology
Cornell University

¹ Shedletsky, Stuart. *Still Working: Art Exhibition*. New York: Parsons School of Design, 1987, p. 13.

² The Research Center's *Information on Artists* study was completed in 1988 in ten US locations; in 1997 in four of the original cities; and in 2003 in the San Francisco Bay Area, leveraging over \$1 million for artists there. www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/rcac