

FEATURE

Visual Artist,
prior recipient and
current Peer Panel
member of the
Fellowships in
the Arts

susan hagen



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I am writing this to express my admiration and share some of my experiences related to the Independence Foundation's Fellowships in the Arts program.

My own experiences with funding from the Foundation were game changers. It is a reality for me and many other artists that we struggle to remain productive in uncertain economic times, when sales are unpredictable and sometimes far between. A Fellowships in the Arts grant can truly save the soul of an artist. In my own case, teaching and writing helps me to pay my day-to-day bills, but there is a trade off in that they require enormous amounts of time and energy. Key project funding from the Independence Foundation has given me the time to focus on the important themes of my work at critical moments and truly advance my vision as an artist.

I strongly believe that the time we live in requires every artist to fight hard for the preservation of human values, civil engagement and meaning, and carry the torch of culture forward to the next generation. As an engaged citizen of the city, I have long admired the complexity and beauty of urban life. My project, Citizens, which has been generously supported by the Foundation, is a series of drawings and sculptures documenting the ordinary people who make up the fabric of public life in Philadelphia. This work is challenging, exciting, and gets me out of my comfort zone. I have worked with homeless people and street performers, construction workers and community gardeners, and this has given me a deeper understanding of the uniqueness of each of Philadelphia's

FELLOWSHIPS

IN THE ARTS

citizens and the richness of the diverse subcultures around me. The process I use to create my sculptures is a traditional and very time-consuming process of hand woodcarving, which I love for its ability to capture details and the individuality of each of my subjects. Funding from the Independence Foundation has given me the ability to work with more people and explore the deeper ideas in this work, without undue consideration of its marketability. For this, I am extremely grateful.

Through my work on the panel over the years, I have seen the positive effects of Independence Fellowships on a large number of artists in the Philadelphia area. This type of funding (focused on projects) acts like a kind of lever, and helps artists achieve what would have been unreachable goals in their creative work. As a member of the panel, I have participated in the careful appraisal of each artists' work and proposal. Though each person's request for support in terms of their work, processes and

goals are quite different – and these include travel, tools, materials and training, as well as the luxury of more time in the studio – time after time, I have seen the huge impact that a focused and well-timed project grant can make to an artist. Many images of the strong, cohesive bodies of work from over the years come to mind. I still remember Judy Taylor's wonderful series of photographs of lost mittens from the early years of the program. This work, funded by grants from the Independence Foundation, have over time added immeasurably to the life and culture of the City of Philadelphia.

On behalf of a generation of Philadelphia artists, I am very grateful for the support of the Foundation, and to the enlightened stewardship of Judge Beck, Susan Sherman and the board. I am honored to have been a part of the process and to help with the advancement of the program in the future.



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