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Franz and Virginia Bader Fund Nurtures Mid-Career Artists

Franz Bader, the legendary Washington art dealer and bookstore owner, nurtured local artists during his lifetime, and he continues to do so long after his death.

The Franz and Virginia Bader Fund, established in 2001 in accordance with the will of Bader's widow, Virginia, awards grants to visual artists who are at least 40 years old and live within 150 miles of Washington, D.C. Since 2002, the Bader Fund has distributed \$245,000 to 13 grantees. Two to three awards of between \$15,000 and \$25,000 are given each year. They can be used for any purpose, such as time off from a job, travel, working in other media, or remodeling a studio. The most recent grants, announced in December 2006, went to three artists, including, for the first time, two photographers. The recipients are photographers Frank Hallam Day, Washington, D.C., and Joe Mills, Annandale, Virginia, and Philip Geiger, Charlottesville, Virginia, a painter.

The first exhibition of Bader Fund recipients' work was held November 8, 2006-January 26, 2007, at George Washington University's Luther W Brady Art Gallery. One hopes it will become an annual event! Michael O'Sullivan's glowing January 12, 2007, review in The Washington Post brought visitors to the show. Before then, O'Sullivan reported, the Bader prize winners, "seem habitually to have received less publicity than, say, that of the winners of the Trawick Prize or the Bethesda Painting Awards, both of which feature annual showcases devoted to the competitions' finalists."

"The Franz and Virginia Bader Fund: Artists of the First Three Years" was organized by GWU University Art Galleries director Lenore Miller and Johanna Halford MacLeod, the Bader Fund's executive director. It featured oil paintings, works on paper, and sculptures by seven artists who received grants in 2002-2004. Among them were Kevin MacDonald of Silver Spring, Maryland, the late printmaker and painter to whom the show was dedicated, and Charles Ritchie, also of Silver Spring, whose specialty is drawings and prints. Also in the show were works by sculptor Yuriko Yamaguchi of Vienna, Virginia, and paintings by Steven Kenny of Washington, Virginia, and by Scott Noel, Alex Kanevsky, and Susan Moore, all of Philadelphia.

O'Sullivan found that MacDonald's two prints and one painting were "inspired by the architecture and angst of suburbia" and "seem to throb with an otherworldly power." They have, he wrote: a pull that is, I think, universal in these meditations on memory, longing, and loss. A similar pull can be felt in Ritchie's works, especially in the two small drawings identified as-but not immediately obvious as-selfportraits. Gradually, it becomes apparent that the images are reflections in windows ... Like MacDonald's work, the built environments around us seem meant to be read as stand-ins for our own theatrically shadowed psyches.

Ritchie has been with the National Gallery of Art, where he is currently Associate Curator of Modern Prints, for 27 years. He used his Bader grant to take time off so he could concentrate on a series of nocturnal self-portrait drawings and a mezzotint with soapground aquatint. He also filled nearly two handmade books with writing and color images. "I work fairly slowly and usually complete six to seven drawings a year," he said, "The Bader Fund grant gave me time to prepare for a show last year at Gallery Joe in Philadelphia that sold out. I credit the Bader Fund with giving me time and getting me straight into a really good gallery."

The Selection Process

Bader Fund recipients are chosen by a committee of nine, all friends of Franz and Virginia Bader. They meet in a hotel for two days, reviewing slides and CDs of submitted works, Lenore Miller said.

There were 200 applicants for the three grants made in 2006. While great effort is made to solicit applications, Bader Fund director Halford-MacLeod worries that artists who are not represented by galleries or connected to art schools may not know about the Fund.

Visual artists working in virtually every medium except film, video, and performance art are urged to apply. To date, painters predominate among the recipients, but printmakers, photographers, and sculptors are also represented. Bader was an accomplished photographer and sold ceramic works as well as photographs, prints, paintings, and sculpture in his gallery. The Fund wants its grantees to reflect his diverse interests, and Halford-MacLeod said, "We would love to hear from potters and other craftspeople."

Since most of the Bader grantees applied more than once, Halford-MacLeod's advice to applicants is: "If at first you don't succeed, try again." In addition, artists known in one medium can apply for a grant in another. For example, Richard Weaver, a painter whose work has been exhibited at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, applied for-and won-a grant as a sculptor. "He submitted fabulous terracotta relief sculptures," HalfordMacLeod said, "We all loved them because they were so fresh and different from what people are making that finds itself in galleries."

Franz Bader's Legacy

Franz Bader (1903-1994) was born in Austria, the son of a flour merchant and a painter. By the mid-30s, he owned the oldest bookstore in Vienna; however, after Germany annexed Austria in 1938, Bader, like other Jews, lost his business. With the sponsorship, through a mutual friend, of James Whyte, Bader and his first wife Tony managed to get visas to the U.S. in 1939. When they came to Washington, Bader worked in Whyte's well-known bookstore, which sold modern art as well as foreign-language books and maps, until he opened his own art gallery and bookshop at 1705 G Street, N.W. in 1953.

Many well-known artists, including American printmaker Peter Milton (1930-), exhibited at the gallery. Bader was also always interested in late-bloomers: he was the first Washington gallery to exhibit Grandma Moses, and the first commercial gallery to exhibit AfricanAmerican artist Alma Thomas.

Local artists who exhibited there included WPC artist-member Barbara Kerne, the NGAs Mark Leithauser, and WPC board member Joan Root. "He nurtured artists and it is wonderful that his nurturing continues after his death," Root said. Bader not only exhibited her work, he also made a great effort to keep her in his circle. When Root decided to leave Washington for New York City, he offered her a small monthly advance so that she could concentrate on her art. In return, she sent him some of her artwork and he would deduct her advances from the pieces he sold. The arrangement benefited both of them. The advances gave her the freedom to work on her art, and she sent him her best work, rather than sending it to a New York gallery. Root stayed in New York for 11 years and received Bader's advances for the first three years. She never knew if Bader made similar arrangements with other artists, but she suspects that he did. "He had faith in me," she said, "It made me more focused and very serious about my work." Root also reported that Bader had significantly helped her career: a series of lithographs that she produced sold well at his gallery and his encouragement led her to other important professional affiliations.

"Franz brought printmaking as well as works by a wide range of artists to Washington, and he supported both in the sense that he showcased them in a city that then offered little of either," she said.

Bader wanted that support to last. "As Franz grew older, he felt the need to have something continue ... after him, and that was his vision of the aesthetic riches that could be found in the places that too few people looked. It was for this reason that he and Virginia decided to establish a fund to help older artists ... bring their gifts to the world," Richard Conroy writes in a warm and appreciative memoir of Franz and Virginia Bader published on the Bader Fund website.