

Diane Simpson, Elia Alba, Torkwase Dyson Among 2019 Anonymous Was a Woman Grantees

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Amie Siegel, *The Noon Complex*, 2016
COURTESY THE ARTIST

Last year, artist **Susan Unterberg revealed herself** as the benefactor for the **Anonymous Was a Woman** award, which she established anonymously to support the careers of women artists over 40 years old. Now the organization behind the award has named the 10 women who will receive this year's set of grants, which comes with \$25,000 each.

Among the grantees are **Diane Simpson, Elia Alba**, Nona Faustine, Amie Siegel, and Torkwase Dyson, who also recently won the Studio Museum in Harlem's 2019 Wein Prize.

“It’s a grant for women, which I think is really important, but it’s also an acknowledgement of your career,” Alba, who is best known for her convenings of artists of color, which she photographs for an ongoing series called “The Supper Club,” told *ARTnews*. “It’s looking at what you’ve done—in my case, from the mid-’90s until now.”

Unterberg said that, for this year’s list, the organization went further afield and sought out nominators from various institutions and elsewhere that hadn’t submitted before. (All the nominators and the members of the award’s five-person jury are kept anonymous, though it is known that nominators include past grantees.)

“It was a very hard decision this year for the jury,” said Unterberg, who herself is not involved in the selection process. “Many of these names might not be that well-known, but that’s the whole point”—to support women artists who have not received the recognition that they deserve. She added that this year’s list includes more artists whose work encompasses experimental mediums like performance than in prior years.

Since its founding in 1996, Anonymous Was a Woman has given out over \$5.5 million to 240 artists, many of whom are among the world’s top contemporary artists, including Carrie Mae Weems, **Laura Aguilar**, Cecilia Vicuña, Howardena Pindell, **Amalia Mesa-Bains**, Andrea Fraser, and **Lynn Hershman Leeson**.

“You become part of this legacy once you’re granted,” Alba said, likening it to the Studio Museum’s artist residency, which she did in 1998–99. “I got emotional when I got the call, understanding that it’s been given to the top female artists in the country.”

The grant can also serve as a much-needed windfall when artists at a critical point in their lives and careers, as is the case with Simpson, who is 84. Simpson, who appeared in the 2019 Whitney Biennial and has two solo museum shows on deck next year, said she already has plans for how to spend the money when she receives it and called it an “encouraging boost.” With the prize money, she is looking into purchasing perforated aluminum to create new sculptures, and now she has the means to hire an assistant. She added, “The award has given me a new mindset.”



Elia Alba, *La Joya* (Yelanie Rodriguez), 2019.

COURTESY THE ARTIST.

The full list follows below:

Elia Alba, 57

Marsha Cottrell, 55

Torkwase Dyson, 46

Heide Fasnacht, 68

Nona Faustine, 50

Rhodessa Jones, 70

Jennifer Wen Ma, 46

Amie Siegel, 45

Diane Simpson, 84

Karina Aguilera Skvirsky, 52