



**For immediate release
October 8, 2009**

**Contact: David Trueblood
617-338-3890**

Boston Foundation announces awarding of the first Brother Thomas fellowships

Eight local artists benefit from the generosity of a renowned ceramicist

Boston—It was announced today that eight local artists will receive no-strings-attached \$15,000 fellowships from the Boston Foundation as members of the first group of Brother Thomas Fellows. The fellowships are made possible by the Brother Thomas Fund, established at the Boston Foundation in 2007 to honor the legacy of Brother Thomas Bezanson, a Benedictine monk and ceramic artist credited with elevating the status of ceramics from craft to fine art in the United States with the extraordinary quality of his work and his artistic vision.

The fund, which has been supplemented by discretionary grants from the Boston Foundation's Permanent Fund for Boston, will help "struggling" artists, which was the wish of the donor. The individual fellowships are granted biennially, based on an intensive review by a seven member panel convened by Ann McQueen, Senior Program Officer at the Boston Foundation.

"I am delighted to be able to announce these fellowships, which mark the realization of a very unusual and special gift," said Paul S. Grogan, President and CEO of the Boston Foundation. "Artists enrich our community in many ways, and this is an opportunity to give back in a way that honors the memory of one exceptional artist who knew all too well the challenges of being an artist."

Brother Thomas Bezanson, was a pioneer in pottery who lived for much of his adult life as a lay member of religious communities—first a monastery in Vermont and later a convent in Erie, Pennsylvania—and created works that are currently included in over 80 museums and a host of private collections. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston owns 16 of his works and was one of the first major museums to recognize the extraordinary quality of his ceramic art. Other ties to Boston include a long-term relationship with Bernard and Susan Pucker, owners of the Pucker Gallery on Newbury Street, which represented Bezanson.

The first Brother Thomas Fellows are:

John Oluwole ADEkoje, a filmmaker and playwright who teaches at the Boston Arts Academy, is affiliated with the Providence Black Repertory Theater and Boston's Company One. His film "Street Soldiers" tells the story of urban youth living through a violent Boston summer. The film has been screened at the Cannes Pan African Film Festival and the Roxbury Film Festival.

Kati Agóc, a composer, is currently a member of the composition faculty at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Born in Canada of Hungarian and American parents, Agóc has a doctoral degree from Julliard. Her use of rhythms and harmonies of traditional Hungarian folk music marks her distinct voice within the contemporary orchestral tradition.

Richard Hoffman is a poet who has been writing and publishing for 30 years. Works of his have focused on themes of estrangement and reconciliation, and have previously been recognized with awards including the Barrow Street Poetry Prize for the book *Gold Star Road: Poems*. He is writer in residence at Emerson College.

Barbara Helfgott Hyett is a poet, most recently the author of *Rift: Poems*, which explores marriage and betrayal. She has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and received a National Book Award. She is a visiting scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and at Tufts University. She runs a poetry workshop from her home in Brookline.

Brian Knep creates video projections that are layered, organic and sometimes whimsical explorations of birth, death, aging, communication, coordination and separation. He was the first artist in residence to be named at Harvard Medical School. He builds his work off an expertise in computer programming—his first career was as a computer scientist.

Alla Kovgan, born in Moscow, is a filmmaker now rooted in Boston's dance community; her films have been screened at international film festivals in Paris, Melbourne, Durban, Athens and Roxbury. Her most recent work, "Nora," tells the true story of a dancer growing up in Zimbabwe using a rich palette of light, color, landscape, music and dance.

Tracy Heather Strain is a documentary filmmaker who spent her early working years with Henry Hampton's Blackside Productions, which shaped her interest in documenting issues of race, ethnicity, gender and class as seen through the lives of artists. Her work-in-progress is a feature-length documentary on the life of the writer and activist Lorraine Hansberry, author of *Raisin in the Sun*.

Heather White is a jeweler who makes wearable art that is noted for being beautiful, humorous and conceptually engaging. It has been added to collections in the Museum of Art and Design in New York City and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She is an Associate professor at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

Panelists who helped select the Brother Thomas Fellows include:

Nicholas Baume, formerly Chief Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and now Director and Chief Curator of the Public Art Fund in New York City; **Emilya Cachapero**, Director of Artistic Programs for the Theatre Communications Group; **Michael Cain**, a composer, pianist and Associate Professor at Brandon University in Manitoba, Canada; **Kwame Dawes**, a poet, and Louis Frye Scudder Professor of Liberal Arts and poet in residence at the University of South Carolina Arts Institute; **Caridad Svich**, playwright, translator and editor, the author of over 40 plays and a teacher at Bard College, Rutgers University and the University of Rochester; **Judith Tannenbaum**, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum; and **Joe Zina**, who recently retired as Executive Director of the Coolidge Corner Theatre.

The Boston Foundation, Greater Boston's community foundation, is one of the oldest and largest community foundations in the nation, with assets of \$695 million. In Fiscal Year 2009, the Foundation and its donors made \$86 million in grants to nonprofit organizations and received gifts of over \$72 million. The Foundation is made up of some 900 separate charitable funds established by donors either for the general benefit of the community or for special purposes. The Boston Foundation also serves as a major civic leader, provider of information, convener, and sponsor of special initiatives designed to address the community's and region's most pressing challenges. For more information about the Boston Foundation, visit www.tbf.org or call 617-338-1700.