



## 23rd Heinz Awards Honor Interdisciplinary Performance Artist Ralph Lemon

*Lemon's powerful works integrate dance, film and spoken word*

**PITTSBURGH, September 18, 2018**—The Heinz Family Foundation today named choreographer and interdisciplinary artist Ralph Lemon the recipient of the prestigious 23rd Heinz Award in the Arts and Humanities category. Ralph Lemon is recognized for an extensive body of work that defies traditional conventions of dance and theater, creating instead multifaceted pieces of movement, visual art and language that explore stories of race, identity, spirituality and heritage.

As part of the accolade, Mr. Lemon will receive an unrestricted cash award of \$250,000.

An artist working at the forefront of contemporary dance for many years, Mr. Lemon integrates dance forms known for intense physicality and emotion, with elements of theater, drawing, film, writing and ethnography. Over his career he has created distinctive works for numerous dance companies and is known for his collaborations with noted musicians and artists in other disciplines. Described as fierce and emotionally fraught, his broad spectrum of work and evolving artistic legacy continues to influence both the current and next generation of choreographers and artists.

Mr. Lemon began his professional career as a member of the Nancy Hauser Dance Company, and later worked with Meredith Monk before founding the Ralph Lemon Dance Company in 1985. Over the next decade he choreographed over 30 works for his and other companies, including the Alvin Ailey Repertory Company, Limón Dance Company, Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève, Lyon Opera Ballet, Ballett der Oper Graz and the Boston Ballet.

Mr. Lemon's early choreography was often notoriously physical, involving pure movement and theatrical devices, for which he won an ardent following and critical notice. In 1995, however, Mr. Lemon chose to disband the company to pursue a broader artistic vision. Unfettered by the administration of running a formal company, Mr. Lemon began constructing an unprecedented art/performance work, *The Geography Trilogy*, a decade-long anthropological and artistic inquiry into race, identity and spirituality. The series featured three evening-length multimedia performances:

- *Geography* (1997), an exploration of Mr. Lemon's relationship to Africa and the African diaspora, performed by a cast of nine men of African descent from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and the United States;
- *Tree* (2000), the result of Mr. Lemon's travels retracing the spread of Buddhism, which coupled traditional performers from India, China and Japan with modern dance and hip-hop artists; and
- *Come home Charley Patton* (2004), a meditation on the rural South and the legacy of the civil rights era, incorporating video, speech, jazz and classical music.

Internet projects, gallery exhibitions and three dense books of Mr. Lemon's writing, drawing and photography were also part of the *Trilogy* project, including *Come home Charley Patton*, which was published in 2013 by Wesleyan University Press.

More recently, Mr. Lemon has created a series of new multimedia and performance pieces, including *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* (2008), a raw multidisciplinary work that revolves around Mr. Lemon's collaboration with Walter Carter, a centenarian, former sharecropper and lifetime resident of the Mississippi Delta. The work crosses genres throughout its performance, moving between freeform dance, film projection and spoken narration.

In 2014, Mr. Lemon presented *Scaffold Room*, an installation and live performance that uses a two-story room built of scaffolding as the architectural base for its two performers, and for mounted video screens projecting slow motion images. Awash with unrestrained grief, the work presents its performers channeling a range of media personalities through voice and dialogue.

Speaking about his evolution as an artist, Mr. Lemon states, "Early in my career I was working in the studio with dancers with similar body languages—it was all very insular and modest and exclusive. I found it wonderful and beautiful, until it wasn't. My work and creativity began to explode when I folded my more traditional company and began to travel the world and collaborate with artists of different cultures. It changed the geography of how I thought about dance and work, and everything I did took on an ethnographic component that hadn't been there before. I started bringing in the rest of the world as I experienced it. The best statement I can make about the work that I make is that I want the work to be generous."

Mr. Lemon adds, "I've received this amazing award, but I know that everyone around me works really, really hard. It's both delightful and terrifying to be selected. As an artist I wake up every day with the need to make work about questions that I have about my existence in the world, and how that might be shared."

Mr. Lemon curated the fall 2012 performance series *Some sweet day* at MOMA, and the acclaimed 2010 performance series *I Get Lost* at Danspace Project in New York City. In 2017, he was Professor of Practice of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies at Brown University and, in 2018, he served as the Josep Lluís Sert Practitioner at the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts at Harvard University. A recipient of the 2015 National Medal of Arts awarded by President Barack Obama, Mr. Lemon is currently the Sachs Visiting Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and a Visual Arts Mentor at Columbia University School of the Arts.

"Ralph has consistently created art that pushes audiences to think and feel and ponder, both in the midst and in the wake of each performance," said Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. "The Heinz Awards recognizes the broad and celebrated array of his work in confronting and laying open issues of race, culture, and history through visual and performance art."

Established to honor the memory of U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards this year recognize those who have made significant contributions in five distinct areas of great importance to Senator Heinz: Arts and Humanities; Environment; Human Condition; Public Policy; and Technology, the Economy and Employment. Now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year, the Heinz Awards has recognized 139 individuals and awarded more

than \$27.5 million to the honorees. For more information about the awardees visit [www.heinzawards.net/2018](http://www.heinzawards.net/2018).

In addition to Mr. Lemon, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Heinz Awards honored the following individuals, who will receive their awards in Pittsburgh on October 24, 2018:

- **Environment: Ming Kuo, Ph.D.**, a psychologist whose research on the impact of urban green space on physical and mental health is changing urban forest and landscape design policy;
- **Human Condition: Norman Atkins**, an educator whose bold new model for preparing, equipping and training teachers and school leaders is effecting dramatic, positive change in public school classrooms across the country;
- **Public Policy: Sherri Mason, Ph.D.**, a global expert on freshwater microplastic pollution whose research is raising awareness of the sources and volume of microplastics and microfibers in U.S. freshwater systems, leading to state, federal and international policy change;
- **Public Policy: Enric Sala, Ph.D.**, a marine ecologist working at the intersection of science and policy to protect the world's last pristine marine environments; and
- **Technology, the Economy and Employment: Linda Rottenberg**, a social entrepreneur whose global nonprofit is opening doors of economic opportunity for entrepreneurs in both emerging countries and the United States.

EDITORS/REPORTERS: To obtain photos of Mr. Lemon or any of the other recipients, please contact Abby Manishor at [amanishor@burness.com](mailto:amanishor@burness.com) or 917-539-3308.

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### **About the Heinz Awards**

Established by Teresa Heinz in 1993 to honor the memory of her late husband, U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards celebrates the accomplishments and spirit of the Senator by recognizing the extraordinary achievements of individuals in the areas of greatest importance to him. The awards, administered by the Heinz Family Foundation, recognize individuals for their contributions in the areas of Arts and Humanities; Environment; Human Condition; Public Policy; and Technology, the Economy and Employment. Nominations are submitted by invited experts, who serve anonymously, and are reviewed by jurors appointed by the Heinz Family Foundation. The jurors make recommendations to the Board of Directors, which subsequently selects the Award recipients. For more information on the Heinz Awards, visit [www.heinzawards.net](http://www.heinzawards.net).

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