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Veteran musician and ground-breaking artist awarded 2023 Sachs Fund Prizes for regional arts impact

CINCINNATI (November 6, 2023) – Carolyn Mazloomi, a nationally-exhibited quilt artist and curator, and Norman Johns, an educator and longtime assistant principal cellist for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, have been honored by ArtsWave with the 2023 Rosa F. and Samuel B. Sachs Fund Prize awards for artistic accomplishments and contributions to the cultural life of the Cincinnati Region.

The prize, a bequest from the late Samuel B. Sachs in 1929, was announced last week at the ArtsWave Board of Trustees annual meeting. ArtsWave President & CEO Alecia Kintner notes, "Thanks to the Sachs family's foresight and love of the arts nearly 100 years ago, ArtsWave is able to recognize visionary individuals who have brought distinction to our community through their work in the arts. Norman Johns and Carolyn Mazloomi have each shown lifelong dedication to perfecting their craft, and they have also uplifted marginalized people and stories. We thank them both for their many contributions, and we honor their artistry."

Carolyn Mazloomi, founder of the National African American Quilt Guild and the Women of Color Quilters Network, sees her work as a reflection of her experiences. "My roles as an African American wife, mother and grandmother, born in the Jim Crow-segregated south, have formed just about everything that I've done. So, I create exhibitions both as a curator and an artist that deal with social justice issues and the status of women," says Mazloomi, "The creation of art is about change. That's been my life's work."

Cameron Kitchin, the Louis and Louise Dieterle Nippert Director at Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM), has seen the effect her work has on the region, "Carolyn is a true champion for artmakers and change agents in our community. Over a lifetime, she has brought forward stories of excellence and artists whom we should hear and see. I am continually inspired by the positive and uplifting civic and cultural conversations that she has influenced."

Quilt-making, Mazloomi's art form, is unique in its ability to begin those conversations. "I love working with quilts. They can be very disarming when discussing difficult subjects because every human being has a lifelong relationship with cloth. Textiles can reflect warmth, hearth and home. So, it's an effective way to talk about difficult subjects when you can visualize them in a quilt."

Norman Johns, the nearly 50-year veteran assistant principal cellist in the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (CSO), is originally from West Philadelphia. Growing up, he played any genre of music he could. "I was doing all kinds of different gigs, even R&B. It was all an adventure to me," recalls Johns.

While in Philadelphia, he also saw first-hand what it took to succeed as a member of an underrepresented population. Elsa Hilgers, the first woman to play in a major orchestra, was his cello teacher in college and showed him the importance of not only being an excellent performer but also creating platforms for those who may not have one. "When I got to Cincinnati, I focused on teaching kids of color. I would have the marketing folks at the CSO put aside blocks of tickets for me so my students could come and see what the orchestra was like. They may never have seen that before."

"Norman Johns has served the CSO and the Cincinnati community with distinction for a remarkable 47 years. Throughout his career, he has championed the advancement of talented high school orchestral students from traditionally underrepresented communities. In 1995, he helped to pioneer the Norman E. Johns Award, supporting young African American, Latine, and Native American students with full-tuition scholarships to the Youth Orchestra," says Jonathan Martin, President and CEO of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

Johns recalls, "The first year, there was one award because there was only one applicant! Now, we give out multiple awards each year. It warms my heart."

Martin continues, "The award has provided over \$30,000 in scholarships, and we are proud to share that recipients have continued their studies at major conservatories and universities and won positions at major American orchestras. Norm is critical to this success, and we are grateful for his ongoing commitment to this work."

The Sachs Fund Prize Committee, this year led by Ron Bates, uses the MacArthur Foundation's "genius grants" as a model. ArtsWave assembles a group of this region's most knowledgeable leaders in theater, music, dance, architecture, visual arts, photography and literature to select the individuals who, in their combined estimation, best meet the criteria for this award.

Mazloomi and Johns join a long list of individuals who have profoundly affected the region with their artistic contributions. Previous recipients include Zaha Hadid, Leah Stewart, Phyllis Weston, Stephen Sondheim, Shepard Fairey, James Conlon, Kathy Y. Wilson, Patty Beggs, Victoria Morgan and Annie Ruth Napier.

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About ArtsWave

ArtsWave, the local nonprofit arts agency serving the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky region, is the engine for the arts. Its roots stem back to the late 1920s when the Cincinnati Taft family provided initial investment matched by community support. In the late 1940s, it established the first united arts fund in the nation and, in the mid-1970s, the first organization to initiate workplace giving for the arts. ArtsWave continues to innovate while leading, as illustrated by its No. 1 rank nationally in community arts fundraising; coordination of a sector-wide Blueprint for Collective Action; piloting of new technologies to maximize arts engagement; and development of resources for the arts. Each year, ArtsWave raises nearly \$12 million from tens of thousands of donors — corporations, employees, foundations, residents and others — to support more than 150 arts organizations, projects and artists. Donations can be made at artswave.org/give.