

VILCEK FOUNDATION

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Vilcek Foundation honors immigrant artists with the 2017 Vilcek Prizes

Visual artist Nari Ward receives \$100,000 prize

*Iman Issa, Meleko Mokgosi, and Carlos Motta win
\$50,000 Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise*

New York, NY, February 1, 2017 — The Vilcek Foundation is proud to announce that the 2017 Vilcek Prize for the Arts is awarded to visual artist Nari Ward. The Vilcek Prizes are awarded in recognition of outstanding immigrant contributions to the arts and sciences, and include a \$100,000 cash award. Nari Ward, a New York-based artist originally from Jamaica, was selected for his found-object assemblage art that invites discourse on topics such as race, immigration, and the Caribbean diaspora identity.

“These immigrant artists are explorers and philosophers,” said Marica Vilcek, vice chairman of the Vilcek Foundation. “They seek answers to questions about the nature of power, politics, and the relationship between the individual and the collective, and they do so with originality, imagination, and a strong sense of justice.”

Nari Ward was born in Jamaica and immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 12. He is known for found-object assemblage artworks that address issues of race, immigration, poverty, consumer culture, and the Caribbean diaspora identity. His usage of found objects aims to highlight the history of a place and the urgency of the moment. His installation *Naturalization Drawing Table*, for example, features a large desk—built out of Plexiglas bodega barriers—covered with dense linear drawings made over Immigration and Naturalization Service applications. On select days during the exhibition, viewers are invited to “apply” for naturalization by lining up and filling out an application, giving them a sense of the bureaucratic process of applying for citizenship. Ward has won several prestigious art prizes, including the Joyce Award, the Rome Prize, a Bessie Award, and several other awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. His work has been shown internationally at prominent museums, including the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia; the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia; the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston; and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

The Vilcek Foundation is also honoring three outstanding immigrant artists—38 years of age or younger—who have demonstrated evidence of creative promise. Each winner of the Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in the Fine Arts will receive a \$50,000 cash award.

Iman Issa, a conceptual artist, creates objects and installations in an attempt to address complex philosophical questions. Her original area of study was phenomenology, a branch of philosophy that examines the structures of consciousness that organize subjective experience—or, put another way, how we take meaning from things we individually experience. Later, Issa

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realized that art allowed for nuanced exploration of those topics, and has continued her philosophical questioning through art. She is particularly interested in monuments and memorials—aesthetic forms tasked with a function that hold a shifting relevance based on their location in time and relationship to history. Issa was born in Egypt.

Meleko Mokgosi is a slow, considered painter; behind every painting he produces are hours of research, reading, and conversations with people. Mokgosi is interested in depictions of Africa and its people; he believes that the widespread misrepresentation of Africa and Africans has done a violence to the people of the continent, and through his art he attempts a representation that is fair and just. He is deeply concerned with politics, and seeks to understand and illuminate the relations of power that shape people, families, villages, regions, and nations. He was born in Botswana.

Carlos Motta works in a variety of media—including video, performance, photography, and sculpture—to explore questions of identity, sexuality, and politics, and to identify and dissect the relations between an individual and the culture that forms them. Since moving to the United States in 1996, Motta has become interested in questions of representation and the experience of democracy, the emotional underpinnings of political awareness, and the ways that dominant accounts of history have become biased. Motta was born in Colombia.

The prizewinners were selected by panels of experts in a variety of artistic disciplines. The Vilcek Prize in Fine Arts was decided by Brooke Davis Anderson, executive director of Prospect New Orleans; Deborah Cullen, director and chief curator of the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery at Columbia University; artist Coco Fusco; Massimiliano Giono, artistic director of the New Museum; Paul Ha, director of List Visual Arts Center at MIT; and Sara Raza, curator at the Guggenheim. The jury panel for the Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Fine Arts included Nicholas Baume, director and chief curator of the Public Art Fund; Naomi Beckwith, curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Rita Gonzalez, associate curator of contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hitomi Iwasaki, director of exhibitions/curator at the Queens Museum of Art; and Thomas J. Lax, associate curator at the Museum of Modern Art.

All prizewinners will be honored at a ceremony in New York City in April 2017. In addition to prizes in fine arts, the Vilcek Foundation is also recognizing immigrants in the sciences with the 2017 Vilcek Prizes in Biomedical Science.

The Vilcek Foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the foundation, to honor the contributions of immigrants to the United States and to foster appreciation of the arts and sciences, was inspired by the couple's respective careers in biomedical science and art history, as well as their personal experiences and appreciation for the opportunities they received as newcomers to this country. The foundation awards annual prizes to prominent immigrant biomedical scientists and artists, and manages the Vilcek Foundation Art Collections, a promised gift from its founders.

To learn more about the Vilcek Foundation, please visit Vilcek.org.

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