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## Elgin's Margo Sawyer wins Guggenheim Fellowship

Michael Barnes

April 7, 2018

Margo Sawyer, the Elgin-based artist whose art intersects sculpture and architecture, has won a coveted Guggenheim Fellowship.

The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation recently announced 173 fellowships (including two joint fellowships) in arts and sciences for 2018. This honor comes with up to \$45,000 to support one of the winners' future projects.

"The Guggenheim Fellowship would allow me time and resources to cultivate designs of spaces transcendent," Sawyer says. "Public places that foster contemplation."



Sawyer, 59, has been on the University of Texas art faculty for 30 years. For decades, she has transformed old brick structures in Elgin into multi-use arts spaces.

She is the niece of Harlem Renaissance painter Aaron Douglas and her father was one of the first African-Americans to serve in the U.S. diplomatic corps in the 1950s. He met her British mother in Accra, Ghana. Her grandfather founded the NAACP in Topeka, Kan. and helped initiate the legal action that became *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court decision that struck down school segregation.

Sawyer grew up the U.S., U.K. and Cameroon. In 1973, her mother took her to Egypt during the Yom Kippur War.

"I was about 15 and it was an experience that made me the sculptor I am today," Sawyer says. "We were the first and only 17 tourists allowed in the country. I spent 30 minutes alone in Tutankhamun's tomb — an obsession as with many people ever since. The experience at Abu Simbel, where the monuments are carved into the living rock, a union of sculpture, architecture and painting united, has been my *modus operandi* all my life."

She is currently working on a glass colored spiral immersive sculpture for the U.S. Embassy in Kosovo.



*From Margo Sawyer's recent solo show, 'Reflect: Reflector,' at the San Antonio Play House.*

"The viewer will be enveloped in a pool of color," Sawyer says. "I just completed windows for a private chapel and also I'm working on a commission for the University of Houston all with hand-painted glass being made with Franz Mayer of Munich, who did the exquisite windows for Ellsworth Kelly's 'Austin.'"

Sawyer realizes this is a big turning point during a long career of many achievements, including many works placed in private homes, museum collections and public spaces, along with wide recognition in the Austin arts community, including the Austin Critics Table designation as 2015 Artist of the Year.

"This is an amazing moment for me," she says. "I have been making sculpture since I was 14 years old, and am honored that I have been a sculptor throughout my life. This year feels transformative and the recognition is monumental, a testament to the personal commitment and belief in the vision I have created."