

Graciela Iturbide - 2008 Hasselblad Award Winner

The Hasselblad Foundation has chosen Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide to be the recipient of the 2008 Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography. The prize, consisting of SEK 500,000 (approximately USD 80,000) and a gold medal, will be presented at a ceremony held in Göteborg, Sweden, October 25, 2008. In conjunction with the ceremony, a new exhibition of Graciela Iturbide's photographs will open at the Hasselblad Center.

The Foundation's citation regarding the decision to award the 2008 prize to Graciela Iturbide is as follows:

Graciela Iturbide is considered one of the most important and influential Latin American photographers of the past four decades. Her photography is of the highest visual strength and beauty. Graciela Iturbide has developed a photographic style based on her strong interest in culture, ritual and everyday life in her native Mexico and other countries. Iturbide has extended the concept of documentary photography, to explore the relationships between man and nature, the individual and the cultural, the real and the psychological. She continues to inspire a younger generation of photographers in Latin America and beyond.

This year's award committee, which submitted its proposal to the Foundation's board of directors, consisted of:

- Frits Gierstberg, (Chair) Head of Exhibitions, Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, The Netherlands,
- David Chandler, Director, Photoworks, Brighton, England,
- Monika Faber, Chief Curator, Albertina Collection of Photographs, Austria,
- Michiko Kasahara, Chief Curator, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Japan,
- Patricia Mendoza, Director, Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca, Mexico.

Graciela Iturbide developed a strong commitment to photography, beginning with documentary photography, and evolving it further, with subtle surrealist undertones. She then moved on to geometric and abstract landscapes. The essence of her latest work is a poetic synthesis of both these tendencies. Iturbide has created a strong and personal iconography with her self-portraits, depictions of native plant life, and birds. Visual poetry

and magic run through the entire body of her work, providing a powerful bridge between her personal concerns and the wider reality she observes. Iturbide uses symbols that relate specifically to Latin American geography to embrace social and universal themes, such as life and death. She constructs her photographs into a form of personal ceremony in a very inviting way.

Iturbide had her first exhibition in 1975, when she participated in *Tres Fotografías Mexicanas* at Galeria José Clemente Orozco in Mexico City. In conjunction with this exhibition, a critical appraisal was published in the magazine of the Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City. She has since exhibited widely at major institutions and museums around the world, including the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Her photographs are presently on exhibit at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

Iturbide's career began in 1969, when she was a student filmmaker at the Centro de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC) at the National University of Mexico. Here she met the famous Latin American photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo, who was teaching at CUEC. One year later Álvarez Bravo invited her to become his photographic assistant, and she worked with him for some time. They maintained a bonding friendship until the end of his life. Iturbide already had a strong interest in politics and culture. She traveled to Panama to document the attempts of General Omar Torrijos to establish a left-wing regime.

Graciela Iturbide's first published project was her documentation of the Seri Indians in the Sonora Desert. This project culminated in the book *Los Que Viven en la Arena* (1981). In 1979, the celebrated Mexican painter Francisco Toledo invited the artist to photograph the Zapotec Indians in Juchitán. Ten years later, this work was widely exhibited, and published in the highly regarded book *Juchitán de las Mujeres* (1989). At the time of its publication *Juchitán de las Mujeres* offered an archetypal and intimate portrait of a group of people then unknown to the rest of the world. In this work she developed her own particular style, where the document and a search for the self are in such fine balance that it amounts to a "manifesto" about the culture of the people that appear in it.

Iturbide has always had a special interest in the interactions between nature and culture, tradition and modernity, identity and the landscape. Animals play an important role in her work, especially birds and the iguana. Often they are depicted in scenes that refer to death, slaughter and ritual. Animals, alive or dead, figure with remarkable frequency in her portraits. They contribute to the psychological intensity of both her portraits and self-portraits. Iturbide's personal links to literature, music, film, and the other arts have created a fresh and more complex identity for a photographic culture that has previously been associated solely with documentary work. Her diverse themes are the visual reserves of her curiosity that has taken her to several continents to find her

subject matter. Within this international context she has considered wider fields of knowledge and expressed her vision through different genres: landscape, portrait, self-portrait, the nude, fashion, abstraction, documentation, and still-life.

In 2000, Graciela Iturbide completed an ongoing series of photographs of birds. An exhibition of this work was held at Rose Gallery, Los Angeles and was accompanied by the publication *Pajaros*. At this time, the artist Francisco Toledo, invited her to join him in Oaxaca on a project documenting Jardín Botánico (the botanical gardens) at the Centro Cultural Santo Domingo. Shortly thereafter, Iturbide collaborated with photographers Sabastião Salgado and Raghu Rai on a project entitled "India Mexico". All three artists took photographs in Mexico and India resulting in an exhibition, held at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Chile in 2002. This photographic collaboration is described in the publication *India México, Vientos Paralelos: Graciela Iturbide, Raghu Rai, and Sabastião Salgado, 2002*.

In 2004, Iturbide was invited by the Frida Kahlo Foundation to photograph the inner sanctuary of the home of famed Mexican surrealist painter Frida Kahlo. Two rooms that had been locked for fifty years in accordance to Frida Kahlo's and Diego Rivera's decree, were opened exclusively for Iturbide to photograph. An exhibition of the resulting body of work debuted in the summer of 2007 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C. Iturbide is currently working on a photographic book of fables for children and adults to be published by Steidl in 2008.

Artistic accolades earned by the artist include a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation in 1988. In 1980, she won first prize in the Photography Biennial at the National Fine Art Institute in Mexico City. The UN International Labour Organization awarded her first prize in 1986 for her portfolio *Work or the Lack of it*. Upon the launch of the *Juchitán* series she received the prestigious W. Eugene Smith Award in 1987. One year later she was granted the first prize at the Mois de la Photo in Paris, to be followed in 1990 by the International Grand Prize in Hokkaido, Japan, and the Rencontres International Award from the city of Arles, France in 1991.

Her work is in major collections in Latin and North America, and in Europe.

Selection of Publications:

Los Que Viven en la Arena (Those Who Live in the Sand), 1981; *Sueños de Papel* (Dreams of Paper), 1985; *Juchitán de las Mujeres* (The Women of Juchitán), 1989; *En el Nombre del Padre* (In the Name of the Father), 1993; *Images of the Spirit*, 1996; *La Forma y la Memoria* (Form and Memory) 1996; *Graciela Iturbide, 2002*; *Pájaros* (Birds), 2002; *India México*, 2002; *Naturata*, 2004; *Eyes to Fly With*, 2006; *Roma* (Rome), 2007; *Juchitán*, 2007.

The Hasselblad Foundation

The Hasselblad Foundation was instituted after a bequest from Erna and Victor Hasselblad. The purpose of the Foundation is to promote scientific education and research in the natural sciences and photography. One of the Foundation's awards, the annual international award for outstanding achievement in photography, awarded in 2008 to Graciela Iturbide, is among the most important photography prizes worldwide.

In 1989 the Hasselblad Foundation established a separate foundation, the HASSELBLAD CENTER, with the purpose of promoting scholarly research and education in photography and organizing exhibitions. Beginning in 2008, the activities of both foundations are being consolidated into the Hasselblad Foundation. The exhibition hall, situated in the Göteborg Museum of Art, is retaining the name of Hasselblad Center. The Hasselblad Center houses five exhibitions annually, one of which displays works by that year's Hasselblad Award winner. One of the other annual exhibitions, *New Nordic Photography* promotes younger photographers. Some of our exhibitions tour in Sweden and abroad. There is also an extensive photo collection focusing on Hasselblad Award Winners and Nordic photographers.

The exhibit of Graciela Iturbide's photographs will be opened on the occasion of the award ceremony on October 25, 2008.

Göteborg March 6, 2008

HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION

Ekmansgatan 8

SE-412 56 Göteborg

Sweden

Phone +46 31-778 2150, Fax +46 31-778 46 40, info@hasselbladfoundation.org

For further information about the Hasselblad Award, the 2008 Award Winner, and for press material see: www.hasselbladfoundation.org.

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