



CULTURE

CalArts Realizes Its Tuition Is High—Carrie Mae Weems and More Alumni Want to Help

by Jori Finkel

Photo by Sharon Lockhart

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CalArts alumni who are involved in the university's 50+50 program include (standing, from left) Victoria Fu; Dashiell Manley; Dave Muller; Jim Shaw; Catherine Opie; Lari Pittman; B. Wurtz; Henry Taylor; the late John Baldessari, represented by his self-portrait penguin sculpture, Quack; Naotaka Hiro; Jason Kraus; Liz Glynn; Kaari Upson (seated, from left) Tony Oursler; Andy Robert; Barbara T. Smith; and Kelly Nipper.

Produced by Sydney Mills; Photography Assistants: Gal Amiram, Gwenmarie White, Rafael Hernandez, Lois Bielefeld; Retouching: Gloss Studio.

In a huge studio at the California Institute of the Arts filled with alumni who are now accomplished artists, nobody could take their eyes off the large fiberglass penguin: With alert blue eyes and an open beak, it seemed to be talking up visitors—or fishing for compliments. Barbara T. Smith, the feminist artist who attended CalArts' predecessor, Chouinard Art Institute, in the '60s, and is known for her unusual use of food in her work, fed the penguin a

tangerine. (It held the fruit in its orange beak.) Liz Glynn (M.F.A. '08) wondered out loud, "What is the penguin doing here?" "It's John," answered Catherine Opie (M.F.A. '88). Opie was referring to John Baldessari, the groundbreaking conceptual artist who taught at CalArts from 1970 to 1986 after briefly attending Chouinard. Baldessari, who passed away recently, was ill at the time and could not join the group for the photo shoot on campus that day in celebration of a new fundraising program for the school, which played a major role in L.A.'s growth as a creative center. Instead he sent a double: the four-foot-tall penguin sculpture that he wryly called a self-portrait. The artist Sharon Lockhart, who is currently teaching at CalArts and took the group photo for *W*, had positioned it front and center. She also had a student dress in a devil costume in homage to the late, demonically talented Mike Kelley, who got his M.F.A. from CalArts in 1978 and later taught there.

Launching this month, *50+50: A Creative Century* from Chouinard to CalArts is a program for which 50 artist-alums are creating new works, typically in editions of 10 to 20, and produced by Lisa Ivorian-Jones. The pieces will be sold to raise scholarship funds for the school, in order to support a new generation of would-be artists who might not be able to afford CalArts' tuition, currently at \$50,850.

"The aptitude to be a great artist comes from all over the world, from every income bracket, from every gender identity, from every racial identity, and from different countries," said Ravi S. Rajan, the school's president. "But I know there are students who don't come to CalArts because they cannot afford it." Smith concurs. "Artists are important for an independent vision for our country," she says. "And the likelihood that they can make enough money after graduation to pay back huge loans is small."

The project will roll out over the next five years, with works by 10 initial artists to be unveiled at REDCAT, CalArts' gallery in Downtown L.A., this

month, when all the monde is in town for Frieze Los Angeles. Baldessari's penguin, *Quack*, is going in the exhibition, as are Smith's *Invisible*, a transparent assemblage made of handblown glass, air, and water, and new photographs by Anne Collier (B.F.A. '93) and Carrie Mae Weems (B.F.A. '81).

“Tuition in my day was about \$3,500 a semester,” said the painter Lari Pittman (M.F.A. '76). “I had a great education here—just incredible. But I was the type of person who needed to be left alone, not prodded.” The video artist Tony Oursler (B.F.A. '79), who once studied with Baldessari, said he recognized the site of the photo shoot even though it's now outfitted as a dance atelier, complete with mirrors and barres. “I think my studio was in this room,” he offered. “And I shot some of my very first videos right outside, where I yelled at birds trying to get them to do my bidding.”