

MEDIA RELEASE

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2015 Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize awarded to Njideka Akunyili Crosby

The Studio Museum Celebrates the Tenth Annual Wein Prize



Njideka Akunyili Crosby, *Nwantinti*, 2012

New York, NY, October 27, 2015—The Studio Museum in Harlem has awarded the tenth annual **Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize** to **Njideka Akunyili Crosby**. The Wein Prize, one of the most significant awards given to individual artists in the United States today, was established in 2006 by jazz impresario, musician and philanthropist **George Wein** to honor his late wife, a long-time Trustee of the Studio Museum and a woman whose life embodied a commitment to the power and possibilities of art and culture. The **\$50,000** award recognizes and honors the artistic achievements of an African-American artist who demonstrates great promise and creativity.

Inspired by his wife's life-long support of living artists, George Wein envisioned the Wein Prize as an extension of the Studio Museum's mission to support experimentation and excellence in contemporary art. "The Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize, now in its tenth year, is an amazing opportunity to provide meaningful support to an African-American artist of great innovation and promise," said Director and Chief Curator Thelma Golden. "Selecting Njideka Akunyili Crosby this year was especially meaningful, as she is an alumna of our signature *Artist-in-Residence* program and truly represents the global nature of the Studio Museum's mission and reach. Her work embodies the ideals of innovation and promise that were so important to Joyce Alexander Wein. George Wein's support of the prize is a fitting tribute to his late

wife Joyce Alexander Wein and an incredible force in the lives of the artists who have received it.” Thelma Golden and more than 800 guests celebrated the tenth annual Wein Prize at the Museum’s Gala 2015 on Monday, October 26, 2015.

Born in Enugu, Nigeria, in 1983, Njideka Akunyili Crosby received her BA from Swarthmore College (2004) and her MFA from Yale University School of Art (2011). Her work is currently being exhibited in *Njideka Akunyili Crosby: The Beautiful Ones* at Art + Practice, Los Angeles, in conjunction with *Hammer Projects: Njideka Akunyili Crosby* at the Hammer Museum. Akunyili Crosby’s work is informed by her Nigerian heritage, contemporary postcolonial African cosmopolitanism and her life in the United States. The tension between these experiences is critical to her work.

In her vibrant, textured works on paper, Akunyili Crosby employs collage and acetone-transferred images in her depictions of intimacy and domestic life. Her scenes are created by incorporating paintings and photographs of herself, her husband and her family with found images from popular Nigerian fashion and lifestyle magazines. Her intimate depictions of domestic spaces and everyday life provide an important counter-narrative to the often troubled representations of Africa’s complex political and social conditions in the media and in the public imagination. The paintings—with their unorthodox shifts in perspective, introduction of specific Nigerian or West African points of reference and foregrounding of subjects of African descent—challenge conventions of representation and portraiture, even as they filter a number of art historical and literary influences.

Among her many accomplishments, Njideka Akunyili Crosby was awarded the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s James Dicke Contemporary Art Prize in 2014. She participated in The Studio Museum in Harlem’s *Artist-in-Residence* program in 2011–12 and has been featured in Studio Museum group exhibitions including *Draped Down* (2014), *The Bearden Project* (2012) and *Primary Sources: Artists in Residence 2011–12* (2012). Her work has been exhibited widely at venues including New Museum, New York; The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco; and the Bronx Museum of the Arts, among others. Her work is in the collections of major museums including Yale University Art Gallery; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; the Studio Museum; Nasher Museum of Art and Tate, London. In 2016 Akunyili Crosby will have solo exhibitions at the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida, and Victoria Miro Gallery, London. Njideka Akunyili Crosby lives and works in Los Angeles.

About the Joyce Alexander Wein Prize

Along with Njideka Akunyili Crosby, the Joyce Alexander Wein Prize has honored the work of and facilitated the artistic growth of nine previous recipients: **Samuel Levi Jones** (2014), **Gary Simmons** (2013), **Jennie C. Jones** (2012), **Leonardo Drew** (2011), **Leslie Hewitt** (2010), **Glenn Ligon** (2009), **Nadine Robinson** (2008), **Trenton Doyle Hancock** (2007) and **Lorna Simpson** (2006). In some cases, such as with Drew, Ligon and Simpson, the prize recognized and saluted decades of important work by midcareer artists. On the other hand, Hancock, Hewitt, Robinson and now Akunyili Crosby, received the prize relatively early in their careers, providing both broadened attention and a resource for experimentation. In all cases, the prize’s direct cash grants



Joyce Alexander Wein and George Wein, c. 1990s.

to artists, now totaling half a million dollars, has had an unprecedented impact on contemporary African-American art.

George Wein met Joyce Alexander at a concert in 1947, when she was a nineteen-year-old senior at Simmons College. They began an exploration of jazz and the arts that grew through their college years, continued to their marriage in 1959 and lasted throughout their fifty-eight-year romance and business partnership. Together, Joyce and George created a brilliant collection of African-American art dating from the 1920s to the 1990s, which was shown publicly for the first time at the Boston University Art Gallery just a few months after Joyce's passing. Journalist Ed Bradley noted in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition that to his friends Joyce and George, "collecting art was like collecting knowledge." Throughout her life, Joyce was deeply involved with philanthropy, and the arts were not the only beneficiaries of her generosity. She and George established the Joyce and George Wein Chair in African American Studies at Boston University (George's alma mater). The Alexander Family Endowed Scholarship Fund at Simmons College, from which Joyce graduated as a chemistry major, followed. Joyce was also a founder of the New York Coalition of 100 Black Women. In partnership with Kenneth Chenault and his wife, Studio Museum Board Member Kathryn C. Chenault, the Weins have been major fundraisers for the Harlem Children's Zone.

George Wein opened the Boston club Storyville in 1950 and produced the first Newport Jazz Festival in 1954 and Newport Folk Festival in 1959. He advanced the business of live music and pioneered the concept of sponsor association with music events. Wein continues to perform, speak and receive honors around the world. His award-winning biography, *Myself Among Others: A Life in Music*, has become a major reference on jazz history.

About The Studio Museum in Harlem

Founded in 1968, The Studio Museum in Harlem is a contemporary art museum that focuses on the work of artists of African descent locally, nationally and globally, as well as work that has been inspired and influenced by African-American culture. The Museum is committed to serving as a unique resource in the local community, and in national and international arenas, by making artworks and exhibitions concrete and personal for each viewer.

Hours and Admission

The Studio Museum is open Thursday and Friday, noon-9pm; Saturday, 10am-6pm; Sunday, noon-6pm. The museum is closed to the public on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Museum admission is by suggested donation: \$7 for adults, \$3 for students (with valid id) and seniors. Free for children 12 and under. Sundays are free at the Studio Museum, thanks to generous support from Target.

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