

## The New York Times

### This Year's 'Genius Awards' Reach Into Unusual Fields

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The first woman to be the music director of a major American orchestra, a filmmaker who documented the lives of Romanian street children, and an engineer at the forefront of the movement to reduce worldwide vehicle pollution are among the 25 recipients of \$500,000 "genius awards," announced today by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

The 11 women and 14 men selected for their creativity and originality range in age from 33 to 66 and also include a violinmaker, a molecular biologist, a sculptor and a laser physicist. All the winners, known as fellows, receive annual checks for \$100,000 for the next five years, no strings attached.

"In the last number of years we have pushed at boundaries to expand our reach," Daniel J. Socolow, the director of the fellows program, said. He noted that a pharmacist and a fisherman are among this year's winners. While the MacArthurs, which began in 1981, still often yield a crop of academics and artists, over the years the winners have included more women and members of minorities, have become more geographically diverse and have snared those with more quirky endeavors.

Most fellows are well known in their fields but unknown to the public, like Michael Walsh, 62, a mechanical engineer and policy analyst from Arlington, Va., who travels the world to help governments find ways to reduce vehicle pollution. Or Olufunmilayo Olopade, 48, a professor of medicine and oncologist at the University of Chicago hospitals whose research on breast cancer in black women helped identify distinct genetic characteristics of the disease in that population.

The fisherman is Ted Ames, 66, from Stonington, Me. A longtime Maine lobster and deep-sea fisherman, Mr. Ames is also a biochemist who has studied spawning, habitat and fishing patterns in the Gulf of Maine. "His work paints a scientifically compelling picture of the complexity of the fish population structure in the gulf," the foundation said.

Some fellows are already well known, like the Brooklyn-based writer Jonathan Lethem, 41, author of the 2003 novel "The Fortress of Solitude," among other works, and winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for his 1999 novel "Motherless Brooklyn."

Marin Alsop, another winner, has also been in the spotlight. The principal conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on the south coast of England, she was recently named the music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, beginning in September 2007.

As he has for years, Mr. Socolow telephoned most of the winners with news of their windfalls. Part of the allure of the MacArthur is that one cannot apply but is secretly nominated and evaluated and receives the news through a telephone call.

Edet Belzberg, a 35-year-old filmmaker who lives in Brooklyn Heights, said she wondered if her call from Mr. Socolow to her cellphone was a hoax. "He asked me if I was somewhere I could sit and speak," recalled Ms. Belzberg, who was strolling down a Brooklyn Heights street when she got the call. "The first place I could go into was a bed store. I don't think I left for an hour afterwards."

Ms. Belzberg, perhaps best known for "Children Underground," a 2001 documentary about homeless children in Bucharest, said she intended to use her infusion of cash to pursue other film

projects. "It's just a huge sigh of relief," she said. "The sources for funding for documentaries has been so limited."

The other winners are Terry Belanger, a rare-books preservationist; Majora Carter, a community organizer; Lu Chen, a neuroscientist; Michael Cohen, a pharmacist; Joseph Curtin, a master violinmaker; Aaron Dworkin, a music educator; Teresita Fernández, a sculptor; Claire Gmachl, a laser engineer; Sue Goldie, a physician and researcher; Steven Goodman, a conservation biologist; Pehr Harbury, a biochemist; Nicole King, a molecular biologist; Jon Kleinberg, a computer scientist; Michael Manga, a geophysicist; Todd Martinez, a theoretical chemist; Julie Mehretu, a painter; Kevin M. Murphy, an economist; Fazal Sheikh, a photographer; and Emily Thompson, an aural historian.