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Black Lesbians in the 70s

Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz

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The Robert Giard Foundation Fellows Enlighten Our World By Carl Sylvestre

This spring, the Robert Giard Foundation's partnership with CLAGS completed the first of what is anticipated to be an annual event in both organizations' calendars.

On Thursday, May 7th, in front of a capacity audience, the first winner of the \$7,500 Robert Giard Fellowship, Sonali Gulati, premiered her film, *I AM*. Two days later, jury members of the Robert Giard Foundation, after a daylong deliberation, voted to award the second Robert Giard Fellowship to the American-Australian team of Molly Landreth & Amelia Tovey for their project *Embodiment: A Portrait of Queer Life In America*.

The fellowship is named in honor of American photographer Robert Giard (1939-2002), best known for his two-decade project, *Particular Voices: Portrait of Lesbian and Gay Writers*, which documented over 600 GLBT writers across genres, including playwright Edward Albee, poet and essayist Adrienne Rich, and novelists Michael Cunningham and Sapphire. The Robert Giard Foundation was formed in 2002 with the aim of preserving Giard's photographic legacy, promoting his work for educational purposes, and encouraging the work of young photographers. To accomplish this mission, the trustees of the foundation have committed themselves to raising funds and awarding an annual fellowship to support young and mid-career artists working in photographic media, video, and film. The fellowship is currently funded for three years and continuing efforts are being made to ensure that this will be an annual grant in perpetuity. The fellowship is open to artists based in the United States and abroad whose work addresses human sexuality, gender, and issues of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identity.

To date, over 160 artists have applied for consideration of this fellowship. The juries, made up of individuals from the academic and artistic communities, have had the challenging task of singling out artists whose work best exemplifies the highest aesthetic and most humane contributions in visual media which advances the rights of GLBT people, or increases the understanding of human sexuality, in America and worldwide.

Sonali Gulati, an Assistant Professor of Photography and Film at Virginia Commonwealth University, used her prize money to travel to India to complete what was still in spring 2009 a work in progress. Her documentary *I AM* focuses on the central question: "What do parents do when they find out their child is gay?" Having lost the opportunity to tell her mother that she is a lesbian, Gulati travelled across India to meet parents and other gay and lesbian South Asians. *I AM* is a personal and revealing documentary that examines the challenges faced by young gays and lesbians in the world's second most populated country where Gulati says, "the subject of homosexuality remains ignored, silenced or even invisible." In a moving moment late in the film, Gulati witnesses the events of July 2, 2009 when the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexual intercourse between consenting adults throughout India.

We hope that the Giard Fellowship will help Molly Landreth and Amelia Tovey capture once in a lifetime moments in their highly accessible, multi-media (video and photography), multi-platform (website, DVD) archive of queer life in America today, and offer a glimpse of what may be in store tomorrow. Their work follows in the tradition of Giard's project of documenting and celebrating GLBT people in our era. We look forward to seeing Landreth and Tovey's nearly completed work in the spring of 2011. As with Gulati's project, supporters of the Robert Giard Foundation will have the opportunity to meet the artists and see the work in its final stages at a private gathering prior to its full public viewing a few months later. It is a cycle that we hope to repeat for many years to come as long as there are deserving artists to support.

Carl Sylvestre is the President of the Robert Giard Foundation and can be reached at giardfoundation@msn.com. To learn more about Robert Giard and the fellowship, please visit www.theroberthiardfoundation.org.

Black Lesbians in the 70s

by Shawn(ta) Smith

During the initial planning session for the *In Amerika They Call Us Dykes: Lesbian Lives in the 70s* Spring Series, there was lack of clarity about the activity of Black Lesbians in the early part of the 1970s. The aim for *Black Lesbian Herstory in the 70s: An At Home Tour and Guide to the Black Lesbian Herstory of the Collection* was to present information to the lesbian community and increase Black Lesbian invisibility.

On April 24th, 2010, a Zine in the format of a timeline of compiled clippings from the Lesbian Herstory Archives subject files was distributed to an audience of over 100 women. The Park Slope limestone was well attended: curator of the Keepin On Exhibit, and poet, professor, **Georgia Brooks** coyly strolled into the backroom; filmmaker, **Cheryl Dunye** roamed the Keepin On Exhibit and discussed her new projects; AALUSC Director, **Kim Ford** provided an overview of the origins of Salsa Soul Sisters; UConn Rainbow Center Director, **Fleurette King** was vocal about her commitment to bringing this herstory to her campus.

The extreme energy was initiated by the *Players*, four Black Lesbians who enacted the text of the Zine's clippings. **Arienne Benford**, **Olive Demetrius**, **Tanika Harbor**, and **Kaz**, collectively read excerpts in the voices of women such as **Pat Parker**, **Audre Lorde** and **Beverly Smith**. Audience members read from the notable *Conditions 5 Black Women's* issue, and the room was filled with voices of 70s lesbians from the Lesbian Herstory Archive's Spoken Word Collection.

Hours of wine and cheese, hugs, tears, and networking later, this event was a reunion. The Fall Festival will hold a replication on Saturday, October 9th where the Black Lesbian in the 70s Zine will be distributed and the conversations may continue.



Arienne Benford, Shawn(ta) Smith,
Tanika Harbor, Kaz and Olive Demetrius

Photos by Kaz