George Soros to Be Keynote Speaker at SIFA Graduation

Philanthropist George Soros will be the keynote speaker for the School of International and Public Affairs' graduation ceremony on May 17. Soros is chairman of the Open Society Institute and the founder of a network of philanthropic organizations active in more than 50 countries. As a successful investor, Soros began his philanthropic activities in 1979, when he provided funding to help black students attend the University of Cape Town in apartheid South Africa. Today, his foundations implement a range of programs focusing on civil society, education, media, public health, as well as social, legal and economic reforms throughout the world.

As an author and philosopher, Soros has published eight books, including The Bubble of American Supremacy: Correcting the Misuse of American Power. His most recent book, The banquet: hungry planet, is scheduled to be published in March.

Kara Walker Wins Smithsonian Award

The Smithsonian American Art Museum recently announced that Columbia professor Kara Walker won its annual Lucelia Artist Award, which is given to a leading contemporary American artist younger than 50. The prestigious award, created in 2001 and funded by the New York–based Lucelia Foundation, has a $25,000 honorarium. Walker, an associate professor of visual arts at Columbia’s School of the Arts, expressed her gratitude for the award, adding that, “It’ll be a great help for my studio practice.”

Walker is best known for her large-scale silhouettes through which she examines slavery, race and the old South. Her provocative work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1997, she received a MacArthur Foundation fellowship. “Walker has already influenced a generation of artists and produced an impressive body of challenging work in a relatively short career,” noted the Lucelia jurors in bestowing the award.

Last year’s winner of the award was Rirkrit Tiravanij, associate professor of professional practice in Columbia’s School of the Arts, Visual Arts Division. His works span a range of media and embrace interactivity, inviting the public to eat, cook and sleep.

George Soros

N

ickolas Themelis Honored by Mining Institute

Nickolas J. Themelis, director of the Columbia University Earth Engineering Center and Stanley-Thompson Professor of Earth and Environmental Engineering (Henry Krumb School of Mines), recently received the Environmental Conservation Distinguished Service Award from the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers. He was honored at the organization’s March 16 annual meeting in New York City. Themelis was awarded to 30 artists in the 2003 American Artists and Craftsmen Competition.

The distinguished awards go to emerging American artists and craftspeople whose work is recognized by their peers and who demonstrate a broad interest in the environment. The awards were presented by the National Endowment for the Arts.

John Mundy Dies at 86

John Hine Mundy, Columbia University professor emeritus and former chair of the Department of History, died April 13. For more than four decades, he taught medieval and modern European history at Columbia.

Mundy, who was born in 1917 in Budapest, Hungary, survived the Nazi occupation of Budapest and left Communist Hungary in 1947 for England, where he graduated from the London School of Economics. Soros came to the United States in 1956 and founded an international investment fund. He is now chairman of Soros Fund Management, LLC. SBIN and graduation will be held at 2 p.m. on May 17, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

Quotable Columbian

Joseph A. Califano Jr. recently discussed his new memoir, Inside: A Public and Private Life, with Tim Russert on CNBC. Califano worked at the Pentagon with Robert McNamara and later became secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in the Carter administration. Currently, he heads the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia.

Asked why he chose to take on that job, Califano responded, “What I saw was that addiction is the number one health problem, the number one crime problem, the number one child abuse problem, probably the number one divorce and family problem in this country. Alcohol, drugs, pills, cigarettes—all of it. The issue is addiction, not the substance.”

Asked if there was no place that looked at the subject as addiction, whatever the substance, that said you need more than doctors and cops to deal with this. You need economists, you need epidemiologists, you need psychologists, you need social workers. We’ve got to take all our skills, look at all substance abuse everywhere in society.”

Kara Walker

The National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts “Kresnoy Sarafos” of Sofia, Bulgaria, will confer an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree on Kara Walker, an associate professor of visual arts at Columbia. The Academy invited Walker to its annual meeting and honored her with the title of Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts.

Walker is recognized by her peers as an innovative master who has continually expanded the boundaries of contemporary art and who has made a significant impact on arts history.

Walker’s work is known for its innovative and challenging art, which has been exhibited in major museums and galleries worldwide. She is a prominent figure in contemporary art and is widely regarded as a leader in the visual arts.

Walker graduated from the London School of Economics with a degree in economics and later received a master’s degree in economics from the London School of Economics. She has been honored with numerous awards and recognitions for her contributions to the arts, including the 2000 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and the 2002 Russell Sage Foundation Award.

Walker’s work has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

The National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts, a prestigious institution in Sofia, has awarded Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees to leading figures in the arts, including artists, directors, and writers. The Academy’s mission is to recognize and promote excellence in the arts and to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the field.

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