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J. PAUL GETTY MEDAL GOES TO LORNA SIMPSON, ED RUSCHA, AND MARY BEARD



From left to right: Getty Board of Trustees chair David Lee, Lorna Simpson, Mary Beard, Ed Ruscha and Getty president and CEO James Cuno.
Photo by Stefani Keenan/Getty Images

LOS ANGELES – More than 300 guests celebrated the presentation of the J. Paul Getty Medal to artists Ed Ruscha and Lorna Simpson and historian Mary Beard at a dinner at the Getty Center on September 16, 2019.

The Getty Medal is the Getty's highest honor, given annually to recognize extraordinary achievement in the fields of museology, art historical research, conservation science, and philanthropy, the founding interests of the J. Paul Getty Trust.

Guests from the worlds of art and philanthropy attended the dinner, including Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin, Studio Museum of Harlem director Thelma Golden, and former British Museum director Neil MacGregor, who introduced the Getty Medalists. Mayor Eric Garcetti also made remarks.

Other guests included David Adjaye, Doug Aitken, Onye Anyanwu, Charles Arnoldi, Peter Asher, Ambassador Nicole Avant, Edythe Broad, Peter and Megan Chernin, Michael Chow, Ambassador James Costos, Kahlil J. Davis, Karon Davis, Tacita Dean, Thomas Demand,

Balthazar and Rosetta Getty, Zoe and Olivier de Givenchy, Lauren Halsey, Thomas Houseago, Alex Israel, Bettina Korek, Glenn Ligon, Bryan Lourd, Ricky Martin, Mike and Irena Medavoy, Tamara Mellon, Michael Ovitz, Norman Pearlstine, Wolfgang and Gelila Puck, Van Dyke Parks, Linda Johnson Rice, Alison Saar, Betye Saar, Michael Smith, Shinique Smith, Jwan Yosef, and Ben Vereen.

Since it was established in 2013 by the trustees of the J. Paul Getty Trust, the medal has been awarded to 14 individuals to honor their extraordinary contributions to the practice, understanding and support of the arts.

Past recipients of the Getty Medal are Nancy Englander, Frank Gehry, Thelma Golden, Agnes Gund, Ellsworth Kelly, Anselm Kiefer, Mario Vargas Llosa, Yo-Yo Ma, Jacob Rothschild, Richard Serra, and Harold Williams.

[Event photos](#)

[VIDEO: Streets of Los Angeles by Artist Ed Ruscha, Recipient of the 2019 Getty Medal](#)

[VIDEO: Meet Classicist Mary Beard, Recipient of the 2019 Getty Medal](#)

[VIDEO: On Artist Lorna Simpson, Recipient of the 2019 Getty Medal](#)

[Announcement press release \(January 2019\)](#)

BIOS

Lorna Simpson

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Lorna Simpson came to prominence in the 1980s with her pioneering approach to conceptual photography. Ms. Simpson's early work – particularly her striking juxtapositions of text and staged images – raised questions about the nature of representation, identity, gender, race, memory, and history that continue to drive the artist's expanding and multi-disciplinary practice today, with painting, drawing, film, collage and sculpture now subject to her alchemy. Over the course of three decades, Ms. Simpson has emerged as a leading voice in a generation of American artists questioning constructed historical narratives and the performative crafting of identity. She deftly examines the slippery nature of representation and meaning to reveal the ways in which larger cultural forces impact the everyday in an enigmatic and profound art.

Ms. Simpson earned a BFA in photography from New York's School of Visual Arts in 1983 and an MFA in Visual Arts from the University of California, San Diego in 1986. Studying on the West Coast in the mid-1980s, she engaged conceptual approaches to undermine the credibility and apparent neutrality of language and images. Her most iconic works from this period depict African American figures as seen only from behind or in fragments. Photographed in a neutral studio space, the figures are tied neither to a specific place nor time. Drawing upon a long-standing interest in poetry and literature, the artist accompanies these images with her own

fragmented text, which is at times infused with the suggestion of violence or trauma. The incredibly powerful works entangle viewers in an equivocal web of meaning, with what is unseen and left unsaid as important as that which the artist does disclose.

In the late 2000s, Ms. Simpson began to work with found photographs of largely African American women sourced from discarded Associated Press images, vintage Jet and Ebony magazines, and archives of anonymous portraits. Simpson re-enacts various scenes, playing both the female and male roles. Interspersing the new images alongside the vintage in one sprawling installation, she skillfully threads together the dichotomies of past and present, male and female, and fact and fiction.

Ms. Simpson's most recent paintings, collages, and sculptures continue to draw upon her extensive collection of vintage magazines from the 1950s onwards, which the artist views as archives of American history. She juxtaposes appropriated images of women from the postwar era and found text with AP photographs of natural elements, such as fire, ice, and water, creating bewitching compositions that seem to teeter on the verge of disaster. Large-scale panels are then shrouded in inky, hazy washes of India ink and paint, further abstracting the works into surreal clouds of uncertainty.

Ms. Simpson's work has been the subject of much critical acclaim and has been widely exhibited, including at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago IL; the Miami Art Museum, Miami, FL; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland. She has participated in important international exhibitions such as the Hugo Boss Prize at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, Documenta XI in Kassel, Germany; and the 44th and 56th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; where she was the first African American woman to be shown in 1990. Ms. Simpson has been the subject of numerous articles, catalogue essays, and monographs published by Phaidon Press and Chronicle Books.

Ms. Simpson's first mid-career survey was exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Miami Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Gibbes Museum in South Carolina with an accompanying monograph published by the American Federation of the Arts, New York, NY, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. In 2013, her works on paper were the subject of an exhibition at the Aspen Art Museum with accompanying catalogue, "Lorna Simpson Works on Paper." A survey retrospective, accompanied by a monograph, "Lorna Simpson" published by Prestel Press, New York, NY, premiered in 2013 at the Jeu de Paume, Paris, France, and traveled to the Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany, and in 2014 to the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, England, and the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA. In 2016, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX, presented a solo exhibition of recent work.

Mary Beard

Mary Beard is one of Britain's best-known Classicists – a distinguished Professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge, and Fellow of Newnham College, where she has taught for the last 30 years. She has written numerous books on the Ancient World, including the 2008 Wolfson Prize-winner "Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town," which portrays a vivid account of life in

Pompeii in all its aspects, from food to sex to politics. Previous books include "The Roman Triumph, Classical Art from Greece to Rome" and books on the Parthenon and the Colosseum. Her interests range from the social and cultural life of Ancient Greece and Rome to the Victorian understanding of antiquity. Her book, "SPQR – A History of Ancient Rome," was published to critical and popular acclaim as was the best-selling "Women & Power," based on lectures given as part of the London Review of Books Winter Lecture Series.

Professor Beard is Classics editor of the Times Literary Supplement and writes an engaging blog, *A Don's Life*, selections of which have been published in book form. "Confronting the Classics," a collection of essays and reviews that Mary has written over the last 20 years for the Times Literary Supplement, The London Review of Books and the New York Review of Books, was published in 2013.

Professor Beard has been invited to deliver various prestigious lecture series. In 2008 Mary was visiting Sather Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, where she gave the Sather lectures on Roman laughter (A book, "Laughter in Ancient Rome," based on the lectures, was published by the University of California Press). In 2011 Professor Beard delivered the Mellon Lectures at the National Art Gallery, Washington, on the imagery of the Caesars. Professor Beard's academic achievement was acknowledged in 2010 by the British Academy which elected her as a Fellow and in October 2011 she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences as a Foreign Honorary Member. In 2012 she was also elected as an International Member of the American Philosophical Society. In the Queen's Birthday Honours list for 2018, she was awarded the DBE for services to Classical scholarship. In 2014 the Royal Academy elected her Professor of Ancient Literature, an honorary position first instituted in 1770; and in 2016 she was awarded the prestigious Spanish prize, the Princess of Asturias Award for Social Sciences.

Professor Beard is a regular broadcaster and commentator on radio and television, and has written and presented television documentaries on Pompeii and Caligula as well as the highly acclaimed TV series "Meet the Romans and Rome – Empire without Limit". Most recently she was a presenter for the BBC landmark "Civilisations" series and is the presenter of the BBC television arts show "Front Row."

Ed Ruscha

There are things that I'm constantly looking at that I feel should be elevated to greater status, almost to philosophical status or to a religious status. That's why taking things out of context is a useful tool to an artist. It's the concept of taking something that's not subject matter and making it subject matter. — Ed Ruscha

At the start of his artistic career, Ed Ruscha called himself an "abstract artist ... who deals with subject matter." Abandoning academic connotations that came to be associated with Abstract Expressionism, he looked instead to tropes of advertising and brought words — as form, symbol, and material — to the forefront of painting. Working in diverse media with humor and wit, he oscillates between sign and substance, locating the sublime in landscapes both natural and artificial.

In 1956, Ruscha moved from Oklahoma City to Los Angeles, where he attended the Chouinard Art Institute. During his time in art school, he came across a reproduction of Jasper Johns's *Target with Four Faces* (1955). Struck by Johns's use of readymade images as supports for abstraction, Mr. Ruscha began to consider how he could employ graphics in order to expose painting's dual-identity as both object and illusion. For his first word-painting, *E. Ruscha* (1959), he intentionally miscalculated the space it would take to write his first initial and surname on the canvas, inserting the last two letters, HA, above and indicating the "error" with an arrow. After graduation, Mr. Ruscha began to work for ad agencies, honing his skills in schematic design and considering questions of scale, abstraction, and viewpoint, which became integral to his painting and photography. He produced his first artist's book *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations*—a series of deadpan photographs the artist took while driving on Route 66 from Los Angeles to Oklahoma City—in 1963. Mr. Ruscha since has gone on to create over a dozen artists' books, including the 25-foot-long, accordion-folded *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) and his version of Jack Kerouac's iconic "On the Road" (2009). Mr. Ruscha also paints trompe-l'oeil bound volumes and alters book spines and interiors with painted words: books in all forms pervade his investigations of language and the distribution of art and information.

Mr. Ruscha's paintings of the 1960s explore the noise and the fluidity of language. With works such as *OOF* (1962–63)—which presents the exclamation in yellow block letters on a blue ground—it is nearly impossible to look at the painting without verbalizing the visual. Since his first exhibition with Gagosian in 1993, Mr. Ruscha has had 21 solo exhibitions with the gallery, including *Custom-Built Intrigue: Drawings 1974-84* (2017), comprising a decade of reverse-stencil drawings of phrases rendered in pastel, dry pigment, and various edible substances, from spinach to carrot juice. The first retrospective of Mr. Ruscha's drawings was held in 2004 at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Mr. Ruscha continues to influence contemporary artists worldwide, his formal experimentations and clever use of the American vernacular evolving in form and meaning as technology and Internet platforms alter the essence of human communication. Mr. Ruscha represented the United States at the 51st Biennale di Venezia (2005) with *Course of Empire*, an installation of 10 paintings. Inspired by 19th-century American artist Thomas Cole's famous painting cycle of the same name, the work alludes to the pitfalls surrounding modernist visions of progress. In 2018 Mr. Ruscha's *Course of Empire* was presented concurrently with Mr. Cole's at the National Gallery in London.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

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