Citation: Mr Jack Ginsberg

Jack Ginsberg is a passionate and long-standing supporter of contemporary South African art. In his roles as founding patron of The Ampersand Foundation (TAF), founder and donor to The Ampersand Foundation Endowment at Wits Art Museum (TAFE), financial supporter of Artist’s Proof Studio (APS) and affiliated artists, and collector of contemporary South African art and artists’ books, he has made a huge impact on the visual arts and community of artists in South Africa. Ginsberg’s involvement in the wider arts community has also included representation on boards of community art centres, such as the Johannesburg Art Foundation and institutions, such as the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

The Ampersand Foundation (TAF) was established by Ginsberg in 1997 in recognition of the need for South African artists to be exposed to the international art world in order to be able to achieve their full potential. At the time, South Africa’s long political isolation was ending but geographical and financial challenges remained in place. Ginsberg’s solution was the establishment of the not-for-profit TAF as a mechanism to enable meaningful access to New York and the acquisition of a centrally placed apartment in Manhattan. Since then TAF has enabled over 120 South African artists and those working in the visual arts and drama sectors, including many Wits graduates and staff members, to spend time in residency in New York. The fellowship provides free accommodation, free access to many museums and galleries, maps, advice, contacts and support. The residencies last between six weeks and three months and the programme has been running uninterrupted for 16 years. Artists are selected by TAF according to an assessment of how much they are likely to benefit from the opportunity. All cite the residency as being an extraordinary gift, a unique interval in their careers that has afforded them incomparable experiences, exposure and opportunities for new perspectives and perceptions.

Ginsberg also established The Ampersand Foundation Endowment (TAFE) in 2011 with the intention of endowing the Wits Art Museum (WAM) as a means of furthering the fine arts in South Africa. TAFE is already in place as a pilot, but is primarily envisaged as the vehicle whereby the TAF assets will be donated to Wits on Ginsberg’s death. The interest will be used to support research, acquisitions and programming at Wits Art Museum and is intended to duplicate (or extend the ethos of) The Ampersand Foundation.

Ginsberg is also a serious and long-term collector of art and he has assembled a highly regarded collection, both through the acquisition of important historical South African artworks and through his ongoing support of contemporary South African artists. This collection, numbering almost 2000 artworks, has been bequeathed to WAM, but it is Ginsberg’s vision and foresight in recognising the emergent art form of artists’ books in the early 1960s for which he has received most acclaim. Ginsberg has created a world-renowned collection of this specialist form of art-making, and in particular a sub-collection on the development of this genre. His support for artists producing artists’ books in South Africa has enabled South African artists inclusion in worldwide collections. The significance of this collection is evidenced by its exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1996. Artists’ Books in the Ginsberg Collection, the first exhibition of artists’ books ever to be held in South Africa, was curated by David Paton and was at the time one of the largest exhibitions of its kind in the world.
Ginsberg is one of Wits Art Museum’s most consistent donors of artworks, having given the museum 12 pieces in 2012 alone. This is particularly significant considering the limited resources that the University itself is able to allocate to the development of the WAM art collection, resulting in reliance on generous donors to grow the holdings in any significant way. This includes purchasing significant works from Colbert Mashile, Motsamai Thabane, Walter Oltmann, Gerard Marx and many others. He also serves on the WAM Advisory Board and WAM Acquisitions Committee where his extensive knowledge and experience in the South African art sector are hugely appreciated. Ginsberg was instrumental in facilitating a donation of R3 million by the Petrow family towards the building of the new museum. He also facilitated the donation of funds by the C.J. Petrow Foundation that are used to grow the museum’s library collection of books related to the museum’s collections.

Jack Ginsberg’s financial and moral support has contributed substantially towards the building of the new Wits Art Museum. The museum has been open for a little more than a year. It has regenerated a very visible part of the urban fabric of Braamfontein. During the 5 week run of Song for Sekoto a retrospective exhibition on the work of Gerard Sekoto (April/May 2013), nearly 5 500 people visited the museum, including 1 400 school children, a large proportion from previously disadvantaged schools.

It is for Ginsberg’s contribution to the arts sector in South Africa at large and his specific contribution to the University of the Witwatersrand in particular that the University wishes to award him with a gold medal.

To be invited to the ceremony:

[Julia Charlton, Senior Curator: Wits Art Museum]

This motivation carries the support of Dr David Andrew, head of the Division of Visual Art at Wits School of Art and Professor Anitra Nettleton, Chair of the Centre for the Creative Arts of Africa.]