

PDNEWS

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By Daryl Lang and David Walker



Winners Announced for Two Major Grants

Adriana Lopez Sanfeliu has won the 2006 National Press Photographers Association-Nikon Documentary Sabbatical Grant, a \$15,000 award, while Ford Gilbreath and Martin Weber have won the first two \$25,000 grants handed out by the newly-formed No Strings Foundation.

The NPPA-Nikon grant, awarded to photographers working on photo essays, went to Sanfeliu to support her project "Life on the Block," documenting the lives of young Puerto Rican women in New York.

Sanfeliu, a freelancer who lives in Brooklyn, New York, studied art history and graphic design in Barcelona before coming to New York in 2001 to study at the International Center of Photography, according to the NPPA.

Sanfeliu says she started her project by observing the street life of young men in Spanish Harlem, including one who was recovering from a gunshot wound. She gradually developed a relationship with the women in the neighborhood and began documenting their role in family life.

Sanfeliu says it took several months of dialogue just to get her subjects comfortable enough to let her take pictures.

"Since I'm a white woman, even if I'm Spanish speaking, they were really not trusting," she says.

The timing of the grant is especially good for Sanfeliu, since she was debating whether to continue her work in Harlem or work on more lucrative photography. "Anything I was doing on the side was just to support

Above, left: Manhattan's Spanish Harlem, from Sanfeliu's "Life on the Block." Middle and right: Images from Gilbreath and Weber, who won "No Strings" grants.

myself in New York," she says.

This year's NPPA-Nikon judges were Joe Elbert, assistant managing editor of photography at *The Washington Post*; James Wallace, photography director for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*; and Elizabeth Krist, illustrations editor at *National Geographic*. More information about the grant is available at <www.nppa.org>.

The No Strings Foundation, meanwhile, has just started giving out sizable grants to photographers chosen in a secret nomination process, according to executive director Tim Wride. Gilbreath, who is based in Seattle, and Weber, an Argentinean artist living in Brooklyn, New York will each get \$25,000 to spend however they please.

"We tried to make the grants at a level that would really buy the luxury of time," Wride says.

Any photographer who has been out of school for at least five years and has a primary residence in the U.S. is eligible. Judges choose the award winners based on their creative potential.

There is no application process. Instead, secret nominations for "No Strings" grants come from a group of 20 anonymous photo experts that will change each year. One member of the 2005 group was *PDN* creative director Darren Ching.

Combating Offshore Competition: Furniture Photographer Studio in China

40 West Inc., a High Point, North Carolina, photo studio specializing in furniture photography, has opened a 20,000 square-foot satellite studio in China, owner Bill Thomas has announced.

The move is significant because the furniture industry, which has many photo studios in North Carolina, has shifted manufacturing to China in part because of the advantage of lower labor costs. Furniture photographers are also expected to soon outsource photography to China as well.

"Our clients definitely need to get their sample [photo] as soon as it comes off the production line, and the U.S. so clients can begin marketing the furniture long before it's even in the U.S.," Thomas says. New furniture samples take 45 or more days to photograph in China as soon as it comes off the production line, and the U.S. so clients can begin marketing the furniture long before it's even in the U.S.

"We're over there [in China] to help them get their product as soon as it comes off the production line, and the U.S. so clients can begin marketing the furniture long before it's even in the U.S." Saving clients money is a secondary consideration, he says. "We're hopeful we'll get more U.S. photographers as well, but that's not goal number one."

Thomas expects to employ eight people, including two photographers, at the new studio. (40 West in High Point studio has 30,000 square feet, employing about 100 photographers during peak times.)

For now, Thomas is sending his U.S. staff to cover assignments in China and hire local photographers in the coming weeks.

One hurdle will be training Chinese photographers to sell in the U.S. market. They don't really understand [the U.S.] market. They have a look at the U.S. market, but I'm hopeful we can find local photographers that do a real good job of it.

Meanwhile, other photo studios in High Point are watching the furniture industry's move to China.

Kreber, one of the largest High Point studios, has considered moving to China but has no immediate plans to do so. "It could happen in the future, but it's not competitive," says Troy Machamer, Kreber's VP of studio operations.

John Raines, owner of Atlantic Photographics, says he has considered moving to China but has no immediate plans to do so. "I'd like to photograph a living room set for one of my clients. That client is from a Chinese photo studio (not 40 West)—for \$70. (That's not a bad deal.)"

"We just can't compete with that," even if Atlantic had a studio in China. "We considered opening a studio over there, but our commitment to live there, and that's where our training is, adds, "If you open up a shop over there, you would only be training people to compete with you."

Establishing business operations in China is also difficult because of bureaucratic barriers. Thomas says he started traveling to China in 2004. He's mum about how he got started.

"What it comes down to is finding and working with the right people. Some Chinese business associates. Without them I'd have a hard time doing business in China."