

LIGHTBOX ON OUR RADAR

# Photographer LaToya Ruby Frazier Wins MacArthur ‘Genius Grant’ of \$625,000



LaToya Ruby Frazier—Aperture

LaToya Ruby Frazier is the only photographer among this year's 24 winners of the prestigious [John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellows grant](#). She will receive \$625,000 over the course of five years to support her documentary work.

"I'm overjoyed to receive this award because often, when you're a young black woman talking about inequality, people don't take you seriously," she says. "It's validation to my work being a testimony and a fight for social justice and cultural change."

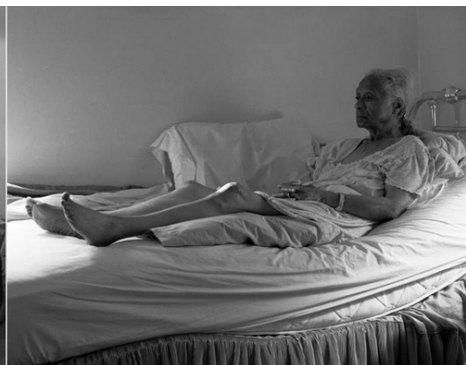
Frazier, a 33-year-old assistant professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, has examined issues of social inequality, class and industrial decline through portraits, still lifes, landscapes and most recently, aerial views. Her ongoing project, *The Notion of Family*, documents herself and her family amid the economic decline and failing health care system in Braddock, Penn., a town historically known for its steel mill industry.

Her black and white images shed light on those who have been there generation after generation. Many who worked in the mills are not only unemployed because of the downsizing but have also lost access to health care when the community hospital was demolished in 2010. Her book, which captures the living conditions of those who suffer from the effects of the highly toxic environment, received the ICP Infinity Award. “My work is giving a platform and a voice to the families that have endured this for decades,” she says.

Frazier, who, she says, is battling her own terminal illness (Lupus) and has watched her family die from cancer and other job-related ailments from the factory, says the project is very personal. “If I was going to tell a story about this situation that I experienced firsthand, it was necessary for me to scrutinize my own body and lay bare my own body for the public, in addition to my family members,” she says.



Mom and her Boyfriend Mr. Art, 2005.  
From the series The Notion of Family.



Grandma Ruby on Her Bed, 2005.  
From the series The Notion of Family.



Home On Braddock Ave, 2007.  
From the series The Notion of Family.



In Grandma Ruby's Valor Bottoms, 2010.  
From the series Homebody.



In Gramps' Pajamas, 2010.  
From the series Homebody.



Covered in Gramps' Blanket, 2010.  
From the series Homebody.

For Frazier, this award allows her to expand her work. “I was in disbelief and shock and when I hung up the phone after speaking with the grantees,” she says. “I was overcome with tremendous joy but then at the same time, I had to sit down and take a moment of reflection because an award like this is a serious responsibility.”

With the cumulative \$625,000 funding, Frazier will get back on the ground to continue documenting and preserving the lives of the Braddock community residents. “Telling stories of these families and individuals in the rust belt is an important archive to build,” she says. “It hearkens back to the Pittsburgh Survey, which was shot by Lewis Hine in 1907 and 1908, who documented the living and working conditions of steel workers in Pittsburgh. Had it not been for that work, there wouldn’t have been social and economic reform and policy changes for those workers.”

Past winners of the MacArthur Fellowship include [An-My Lê](#), [Camilo José Vergara](#), and [Lynsey Addario](#), among others.