First Study on Aging Artists in NYC Finds Visual Artists 62+
To Be Engaged, Productive and Plan to Stay in New York

New York, New York – December 4, 2007 – A new study by the Research Center for Arts and Culture (RCAC) at Teachers College Columbia University finds that aging artists offer a great deal as a model for society, especially as the workforce changes to accommodate multiple careers and baby boomers enter the retirement generation.

Evidence for this claim is provided in the first needs assessment of aging artists in New York City now available in the RCAC report “Above Ground: Information on Artists III Special Focus NYC Aging Artists”. The study is the first of its kind to understand how artists—who often reach artistic maturity and artistic satisfaction as they age—are supported and integrated within their communities and how their network structures change over time.

Contrary to the stereotype, aging artists are passionate about their work and experience joy, introspection and humor in relation to it. They rank high in life satisfaction and self-esteem and 91% would choose to be an artist again. Not at all isolated, 77% communicate daily or weekly with other artists.

213 artists age 62-97 and residing in the five boroughs of NYC were interviewed in English, Chinese and Spanish of which 146 were professional artists. The report analyzes data from these interviews in the areas of retirement, life satisfaction, social networks, income, discrimination, education, health insurance, legacy planning, careers, identity and professionalism.

A typical aging artist is 73 years old, lives alone in rent-controlled or rent stabilized housing, has spent an average of 30 years living and/or working in his current borough and has no plans to leave New York City. Highly educated with at least a Bachelor’s and probably a Master’s Degree and a median income of $30K, s/he has sold work during the last year, has health insurance, a retirement plan other than Social Security, and will never retire from art. S/he may have changed art medium due to physical or other restrictions, but never considered giving up being an artist.

The study provides recommendations, many provided by the artists themselves, to support and cultivate the aging creative capital of NYC including using artists’ networks to disseminate social services for the aging, investigating more flexible models of retirement benefits for both artists and other freelancers, adapting rent laws both for seniors and younger artists and valuing the creative contribution of older artists to the human community.

For more information, contact:
Joan Jeffri, Director
Research Center for Arts and Culture
Teachers College, Columbia University
Box 78, 525 West 120th Street New York, NY 10027
Phone: 212-678-8184 or 212-678-3271 Fax: 212-678-4048
http://www.tc.edu/centers/rcac (summary in 3 languages and full report available); rcac@columbia.edu