

**2010 GISH PRIZE ANNOUNCED:
CHINUA ACHEBE, *THINGS FALL APART* AUTHOR,
TO RECEIVE ONE OF THE LARGEST AWARDS IN THE ARTS**

**The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, October 27, 2010
With Lowery Sims, Jane Alexander,
Anthony Appiah, Michael Thelwell, Sonia Sanchez and Baba Ola Jagun**

New York, NY— **Chinua Achebe**, one of the world’s most influential authors, has been chosen to receive the **2010 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize**. With approximately \$300,000 from silent film stars Dorothy and Lillian Gish, the Gish Prize is one of the largest and most prestigious awards in the arts. Gish Prize recipients are nominated by the worldwide arts community and selected for their unprecedented impact in their chosen fields. Achebe will receive the prize and a silver medallion on October 27, 2010, at the Hudson Theatre, Millennium Broadway, New York City. Leaders of the arts including curator **Lowery Sims**, former NEA chair **Jane Alexander**, PEN president **Anthony Appiah**, author **Michael Thelwell**, poet **Sonia Sanchez**, and musician **Baba Ola Jagun** will be among the presenters and guests celebrating Achebe’s work and his impact on the international diaspora of African fiction and voices.

“When I was a boy, growing up in Nigeria, becoming a novelist was a far-away dream,” says Achebe. “Now it is a reality for many African writers, not just myself. The Gish Prize recognizes the long journey my fellow colleagues and I have taken, and I am proud and grateful for that.”

Now in its 17th year, the annual Gish Prize continues to reflect the spirit of the pioneering Gish sisters, paying tribute to artistic trailblazers who have redefined their craft. Gish Prize recipients have shaped the cultural landscape in drama, music, dance, art, architecture, lighting design, film, and literature. Achebe joins an impressive list of past Gish Prize winners including **Robert Redford, Ornette Coleman, Merce Cunningham** and **Frank Gehry**. (Full list of Gish Prize recipients below.)

Achebe was selected by the Gish Prize Committee, which this year includes **Lowery Sims**, curator, Museum of Arts and Design; The Honorable **Jane Alexander**, actor and former chair of the National Endowment for the Arts; **Kwame Anthony Akroma-Ampim Kusi Appiah**, president of PEN and Laurance S. Rockefeller University Professor of Philosophy and the University Center for Human Values, Princeton University; **Vallejo Gantner**, artistic director, Performance Space 122; and **Elizabeth Streb**, Streb Laboratory for Action Mechanics (S.L.A.M.).

“With the creation of the Trust, Dorothy and Lillian Gish were ensuring, encouraging and elevating what they hold dear and consider essential for artists and audiences alike,” says Lisa Philp, managing director and head of philanthropic services, JPMorgan Private Bank, trustee for the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize Trust. “The legacy of the Gish Prize is its devotion to the continuing power of the creative spirit. JPMorgan Chase is proud to be a part of this legacy.”

Chinua Achebe: 2010 Gish Prize Recipient

Born in Nigeria in 1930, Chinua Achebe put African literature on the map with his groundbreaking novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which has sold over ten million copies worldwide and been translated into more than 50 languages. Achebe followed that with over 20 books including novels, short stories, essays and collections of poetry, often using his creative and critical writing as a force to forge a better understanding of modern-day Africa.

A graduate of the University College, Ibadan, Achebe began his career in radio, leaving his post during the national upheaval that led to the Biafran War and separation of Biafra from Nigeria. Achebe went on to represent Biafra on various diplomatic fronts before Nigeria retook the region. Achebe then embarked on an academic career, lecturing widely in Nigeria and abroad. After nearly two decades at Bard College, Achebe is now the David and Marianna Fisher University Professor and Professor of Africana Studies at Brown University.

Achebe has worked continuously to encourage the spread of African culture, not only in his own writing. He founded a number of magazines for African art, fiction and poetry as well as the indigenous stories of the Igbo community, and was instrumental in bringing post-colonial African works to a larger audience as editor of the African Writers Series for Heinemann Publishing. Achebe is also an outspoken commentator on African issues, delivering social and political critiques and spearheading initiatives such as the Chinua Achebe Colloquium on Africa at Brown University.

Among Achebe’s works are *Arrow of God* (1964); *Beware, Soul Brother and Other Poems* (1971), winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize; *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize; *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (1988); and *Home and Exile* (2000). He has received numerous honors including the Honorary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as honorary doctorates from more than 30 colleges and universities. He is also the recipient of Nigeria's highest award for intellectual achievement, the Nigerian National Merit Award. In 2007, he won the Man Booker International Prize for Fiction.

The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize

The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize is one of the largest awards in the arts. Nominations are welcomed from the arts community and may be submitted through The Gish Prize website, www.gishprize.com. The Gish Prize committee, a group that changes every year, considers all

nominations and chooses each recipient. The committee is composed of leaders in the arts community. Past committee members have included playwright **David Henry Hwang**, filmmaker **Mira Nair**, sculptor **Martin Puryear**, dancer/choreographer **Trisha Brown**, composer **Alvin Singleton**, and The Museum of Modern Art president emerita **Agnes Gund**.

The Gish Prize was established in 1994 by The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize Trust. Stars of the silent screen, Dorothy and Lillian Gish brought their unique sensibilities and talents to early film, shaping the development of that art form. The sisters made their motion picture debut together in D.W. Griffith's *An Unseen Enemy* in 1912 and went on to appear in over 100 films each. They also received accolades for their work on stage and in television.

Lillian Gish died in 1993 and Dorothy Gish died in 1968. Their legacy lives on today in The Gish Prize, and in their desire "...to give the recipients of the prize the recognition they deserve, to bring attention to their contributions to society and encourage others to follow in their path."

The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize Recipients:

- 2010 **Chinua Achebe**, author
- 2009 **Pete Seeger**, folk musician, singer and social activist
- 2008 **Robert Redford**, filmmaker, activist, Sundance Institute founder
- 2007 **Laurie Anderson**, multimedia performance artist
- 2006 **Shirin Neshat**, visual artist and filmmaker
- 2005 **Peter Sellars**, theatre and opera director
- 2004 **Ornette Coleman**, jazz innovator
- 2003 **Bill T. Jones**, dancer/choreographer
- 2002 **Lloyd Richards**, theatre director
- 2001 **Jennifer Tipton**, lighting designer
- 2000 **Merce Cunningham**, dancer/choreographer
- 1999 **Arthur Miller**, author/playwright
- 1998 **Isabel Allende**, author
- 1997 **Bob Dylan**, singer/songwriter
- 1996 **Robert Wilson**, artist/director
- 1995 **Ingmar Bergman**, film director
- 1994 **Frank Gehry**, architect

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