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Canadian Photographer, Sarah Anne Johnson, Wins \$50,000 Grange Prize

TORONTO, April 24 /CNW Telbec/ - The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and Aeroplan have announced that Winnipeg photographer, Sarah Anne Johnson, is the winner of the inaugural Grange Prize for Contemporary Photography. The annual \$50,000 prize is the largest of its kind in Canada and the only prize entirely determined by the public. The announcement was made during a ceremony held at the Drake Hotel in Toronto. An exhibition of Johnson's work will be on display at the AGO in spring 2009.

Johnson is known for her minimalist style. Her work explores the use of physical labour in the search for utopia. Her images are a mixture of real and imagined worlds with documentary style photos placed alongside photographs of small theatrical sets she creates. Inspired by her tree planting experience in British Columbia and travels in the Galapagos Islands, Johnson's photographs reflect her connection to nature and her personal struggle to find a balance between community and landscape.

Launched in February 2007, and named in honour of the AGO's historic home, The Grange Prize is a partnership between Aeroplan, Canada's premier loyalty marketing company, and the AGO that recognizes the best in Canadian and international contemporary photography. The winner is selected from a combination of five Canadian and international artists. This year, a jury comprised of representatives from the AGO and Aeroplan selected three Chinese artists: Miao Xiaochun, Huang Yan and Liu Zheng and two Canadian artists: Raymonde April and Johnson. As part of the prize, each artist participates in a residency program travelling to each other's country to experience the culture and contemporary art scene.

A website was created, www.thegrangeprize.com, to feature the five finalists' work, facilitate the voting process and foster a public dialogue on contemporary photography. Since its launch, the site has received more than 17,000 unique global visitors. Johnson received 53 per cent of the 2,700 votes that came in from around the world, including every Canadian province, China, the United States, Greece, Germany, England, Turkey, India, Australia and Japan.

"I am honoured that my work has been recognized by the public and I'd like to thank the Art Gallery of Ontario and Aeroplan for establishing an award to not only recognize contemporary photography, but also to strengthen the link between the Canadian and international art scenes," said Sarah Anne Johnson.

"The Grange Prize was conceived to provide assistance and prominence to new and diverse voices working in contemporary photography," said Matthew Teitelbaum, the AGO's Michael and Sonja Koerner Director, and CEO. "This prize will communicate Sarah Anne Johnson's unique vision to a broad new audience."

"Sarah Anne's work elevates the ordinary to the extraordinary, making her the perfect inaugural candidate for the Grange Prize; a sentiment clearly expressed by the overwhelming support of voters from around the globe," said Rupert Duchesne, President and CEO of Aeroplan. "On behalf of Aeroplan, I am pleased to congratulate her on this outstanding achievement."

The Globe and Mail is the exclusive Media Sponsor of The Grange Prize and played an integral role in the development of the website.

About Sarah Anne Johnson

Born in 1976 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Johnson received her BFA from the University of Manitoba in 2002, and went on to complete her MFA at Yale School of Art in 2004. Her work has been exhibited in a number of solo and group exhibitions in Canada and the United States, and she is the recipient of numerous scholarships and awards. Her first solo show in New York City opened in February of 2005 and garnered excellent reviews from The New York Times, The Village Voice, and Art Forum magazine. She currently resides in Winnipeg.

About Aeroplan

Aeroplan Limited Partnership, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Aeroplan Income Fund, is dedicated to developing and executing programs designed to engage the loyalty of its prestigious membership. Aeroplan's millions of members earn Aeroplan Miles with its growing network of over 70 world-class partners, representing more than 150 brands in the financial, retail, and travel sectors.

Aeroplan is committed to working with its employees, partners and members to support communities and sponsor events inspired by the interests of its members. Aeroplan supports the arts locally, and on the world stage, recognizing the valuable contribution artists make to our communities. The partnership between Aeroplan and the AGO is a unique collaboration of two organizations dedicated to advancing art and culture.

For more information about Aeroplan, please visit www.aeroplan.com.

About the Art Gallery of Ontario

With a permanent collection of more than 68,000 works of art, the Art Gallery of Ontario is among the most distinguished art museums in North

America. In 2002, the Gallery began an extraordinary chapter in its 108-year history when it launched Transformation AGO. Multi-faceted in scope, Transformation AGO involves the unprecedented growth of the permanent collection, an innovative architectural expansion by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry, and the strengthening of the museum's endowment resources. As the imaginative centre of the city, the transformed AGO will dramatically enrich our visitors' experiences and provide new access to the full vibrancy of the art museum. Boldly declaring that art matters, the new AGO will reopen fully in fall 2008.

The Art Gallery of Ontario is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Culture. Additional operating support is received from the Volunteers of the AGO, the City of Toronto, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

For more information about the AGO, please visit www.ago.net.

/NOTE TO PHOTO EDITORS: A photo accompanying this release is available on the CNW Photo Network and archived at <http://photos.newswire.ca>. Additional archived images are also available on the CNW Photo Archive website at <http://photos.newswire.ca>. Images are free to accredited members of the media/

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