



FY27 Project Grant Panelist Biographies

Panel 1

June Klement

Visual Artist

Augusta, Richmond County

June Klement is an Augusta-based impressionist oil painter whose work explores light as both structure and subject. Working between plein air study and studio practice, she creates luminous paintings of landscapes, wildlife, and atmospheric city scenes that emphasize mood, movement, and the emotional resonance of place.

Painting outdoors allows her to respond directly to shifting light and atmosphere, capturing subtle color relationships and transient effects that inform her larger studio works. Rather than documenting a specific location, her paintings focus on the experience of being present within it — the stillness of open water, the rhythmic movement of birds through light, or the quiet glow that transforms an urban landscape at dusk.

Originally from Knoxville, Tennessee, Klement earned a degree in Chemical Engineering from North Carolina State University before returning to painting after raising her family. This balance of structure and intuition continues to shape her distinctive visual language.

Her award-winning work has been exhibited nationally. She is a member of the American Impressionist Society, Oil Painters of America, the Salmagundi Club, and is a Signature Member of the National Association of Women Artists. Her work is held in private collections worldwide.

Lasandra Cobb

Atlanta Drum Academy

Jonesboro, Clayton County

As a seasoned writer, educator of 24 years, and visionary leader, Lasandra's life's purpose sits at the intersection of education, equity, and social-emotional wellness. Her personal journey fuels her passion for challenging traditional approaches to community investments by centering resilience, lived experiences, and undiscovered brilliance within underserved populations.

For the past two decades, she has been committed to uplifting underrepresented communities through the pillar of education, guided by the belief that change begins when we recognize people's potential.

She lives in a space of compassion and equity-centeredness to ignite lasting transformations while honoring experiences. Building communities, celebrating diversity, and creating pathways for access and opportunity.

Mary Kelly

*High Museum of Art
Atlanta, Fulton County*

Mary Catherine Kelly (she/her) is an Atlanta-based artist and community builder with a background in painting and photography. She grew up in small-town South Dakota, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Digital Media Design and Studio Art at Dakota Wesleyan University. In her work at the High Museum of Art, Mary connects people to art, ideas, and each other, and in her free time, she enjoys reading at local coffee shops and exploring all that Atlanta has to offer — usually with her tiny dog in tow.

Megan Odom

*Independent Photographer
Blakely, Early County*

Megan is a licensed insurance agent and have worked in the insurance field for 14 years. She also operates a produce farm and vinyl studio. Megan enjoys taking photos of agricultural land and nature, and she is always looking to expand her range with new talents.

Jennifer Vanderbeek

*Thomasville Center for the Arts
Thomasville, Thomas County*

Jennifer Vanderbeek is an award-winning, self-taught mixed media artist, illustrator, and author living in Thomasville, Georgia. She is currently the Programs Manager for Thomasville Center for the Arts, overseeing on-site and in-school programming for youth and adults at the Center, and serves on the Literacy for Thomas County committee and the boards of Pines & Palms and Primary Care of Southwest Georgia.

Panel 2

Rachel Arnold

*South Georgia Ballet
Thomasville, Thomas County*

Rachel Arnold is the Executive Director of South Georgia Ballet, where she leads the organization's fundraising, marketing, community engagement, and strategic growth initiatives. With a background in nonprofit leadership and a degree in Human Development and Family

Studies from Auburn University, she is passionate about strengthening organizations through meaningful relationships and community partnerships.

A Thomasville resident for more than a decade, Rachel is actively involved in numerous civic and philanthropic organizations. Her community service includes leadership and volunteer roles with the Wildlife Arts Festival, Thomasville Antiques Show Board, Lady Banks Garden Club, Young Life Board, Thomas University Dining for Education Board, Leadership Thomas (Class 42), and the Kiwanis Club.

Rachel is dedicated to fostering collaboration, supporting the arts, and creating opportunities that enrich the communities she serves. Outside of her professional and volunteer commitments, she enjoys teaching Barre and Pilates at The Method, promoting health, wellness, and personal growth.

Marsha Barsky

*Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, Cobb County*

Marsha Barsky is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Dance at KSU. She has 20 years of experience fostering and implementing creative and educational programs for both the public and private sectors. She is a lifelong learner, who continues to hone her craft by engaging widely with contemporary approaches to dance, somatics, and holistic wellness for dancers and non-dancers. She brings insights from her ongoing research to awaken creative well-being and enliven mindful movement practices. Her writings on Dance and the Dialogical Self have been published in the Journal of Dance Education and in Bloomsbury Press's Understanding Philosophy, Understanding Modernism volume.

From 2008-2018, she served as director and choreographer for Nashville-based Company Rose. The company presented works at the Frist Art Museum, and performed in venues throughout the Southeastern region. In 2019, she received a Tennessee Arts Commission Individual Fellowship Award for her choreography. As a dancer, she has performed with the Desert Dance Theatre and Shelter Repertory Dance Theatre, and in works by Isadora Duncan, Stefanie Batton-Bland, Sean Curren, Bill Evans Pat Graney, Gabriel Masson, Ana Baer, Kim Neal Nofsinger, Ivan Pulinkala and Katherine Duke.

Previously, Marsha was an Associate Professor and Director of Dance at Middle Tennessee State University, where she developed Tennessee's first bachelor's degree in Dance, and prior to that she was the Director of the Vanderbilt University Dance Program. She has taught at numerous venues, festivals and conferences throughout the US, and in Canada, France, Switzerland and Spain. In 2017, she was named Foreign Expert in Dance at Chengdu University, China, and in May 2020 she served as a visiting scholar at the Kroeger College of Public Affairs at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

Marsha received her BFA in Dance from Arizona State University, and her MFA in Performance, Choreography and Somatics from the University of Colorado at Boulder. In 2002 she was certified at the ShambhavAnanda Eldorado yoga teacher training in Boulder, Colorado. In 2011, she graduated from the North Carolina Alexander Technique Program (under the direction of Robin Gilmore). Marsha is a licensed GYROTONIC® and GYROKINESIS® trainer.

Christopher Brazelton

Woodstock Arts

Woodstock, Cherokee County

Christopher Brazelton is the Executive Director of Woodstock Arts, a multidisciplinary arts center serving one of Georgia's fastest-growing communities. He leads the organization's strategic vision and day-to-day operations across theatre, concerts, visual arts, and arts education, with all of this work rooted in deep community engagement and mission-driven growth.

Under his leadership, Woodstock Arts has evolved from a grassroots theatre into a cultural anchor reaching more than 100,000 people annually. Christopher is passionate about building sustainable, replicable models that help small-town arts organizations thrive, and he believes the arts are essential infrastructure for strong, connected, and inspired communities.

Autumn Cameron

City of Perry

Perry, Houston County

Autumn Cameron is a municipal event planner and Special Events Administrator for the City of Perry, Georgia, with extensive experience in large-scale community events, sponsorship development, and public engagement. She oversees the planning and execution of festivals, concerts, and citywide celebrations that foster community connection and economic growth. With a background spanning military service, healthcare, and public sector leadership, Autumn is passionate about creating meaningful experiences while advocating for work-life balance, family, and community impact.

Carole Roach

Acworth Cultural Arts

Acworth, Cobb County

Carole Roach is a graduate of Stetson University and Georgia State University with a Bachelor of Music degree, and Florida State University with a Master of Music degree, with additional postgraduate studies at the University of Georgia. She has enjoyed a distinguished 60-year career in music education, church music, and community theatre. A mezzo soloist and choir director for numerous Atlanta-area churches, Carole has also taught at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and Kennesaw State University, while maintaining a private studio in voice, piano, and music theory. An active member of the Georgia Music Teachers Association and the Greater Marietta Music Teachers Association, she holds National Certification through the Music Teachers National Association in both voice and piano. In addition, Carole has been active in community theatre for more than 30 years and founded the Acworth Theatre Company under the Board of Acworth Cultural Arts.

Amy Gresens

*Spruill Center for the Arts
Dunwoody, DeKalb County*

Amy Gresens is an Atlanta-based artist who has spent the last 25 years at the Spruill Center for the Arts. She first came to Spruill as a student in the jewelry & metalsmithing department and transitioned to instructor in 2010. At the same time, Amy launched her own jewelry design business, element47. Prior to that, she spent over 15 years in marketing & advertising. In 2017, Amy brought her marketing experience to Spruill and joined the staff full-time as Marketing Director. She managed all of Spruill's marketing, communications, social media and fundraising events in this role. In 2021 she transitioned into the role of Education Director and helped oversee the 8,300 square foot facility expansion which led to 7 new classrooms and an event studio space. Today, Amy works with over 80 instructors to offer 250+ classes every quarter to our growing arts community.

Panel 3**Dr. Eric Crawford**

*Morehouse College
Atlanta, Fulton County*

Dr. Crawford received his Ph.D. in musicology from The Catholic University of America. His research focuses on the rich tradition of Gullah music, specifically the retentions and alterations that have occurred since the antebellum period. Beginning in 2007, he conducted extensive field recordings on Saint Helena Island, the site of the historic Port Royal Experiment, and his transcriptions are held at the Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. An outgrowth of this work was the Saint Helena Island Gullah Spirituals Project, which brought together noted scholars and students to preserve and foster the study of the earliest recorded Negro spirituals. In 2013, the Athenaeum Press at Coastal Carolina University published his field interviews on a CD and accompanying booklet entitled *Gullah: The Voice of an Island*.

His work on historic Sandy Island led to the 2017 publication *At Low Tide: The Voices of Sandy Island*. This booklet and interactive multi-media project highlight the rich history of Sandy Island and the need to ensure this island's continued survival. As part of this effort, the National Park Service awarded Coastal Carolina University an African American Civil Rights grant to rebuild the island's historic school and create an interactive cultural center. Since 2018, Crawford has worked on the Gullah Geechee Digital Project, which digitizes more than 6,900 historic records from plantation journals, musical transcriptions, and contemporary oral histories. In 2021, he appeared in Henry Louis Gates' miniseries "The Black Church" and was music consultant for the Amazon miniseries "The Underground Railroad." His books are *Gullah Spirituals: The Sound of Freedom and Protest in the South Carolina Sea Islands* (University of South Carolina Press, 2021) and *Gullah Culture in America* (Blair Publishing, 2023).

Shannon Evans

*GEM Theatre
Calhoun, Gordon County*

Shannon Evans is the Communications Manager at The GEM Theatre. The GEM Theatre was established in a former furniture warehouse and mercantile building in downtown Calhoun in

1929 and expanded to its current size in 1937 when it partnered with the Alabama-based Martin Theatre chain. The theatre was Calhoun's only movie house until it closed in the late 1970's. Many throughout the community still endearingly refer to The GEM as the "old GEM-Martin Theatre" or "old Martin Theatre."

Courtney Heath

*Andrew College
Cuthbert, Randolph County*

Courtney Heath is the Coordinator of Development at Andrew College in Cuthbert, Georgia. She is an Andrew College alumna and has worked in the Development Office there since 2014. This is her first time serving as a panelist for the GCA, and she looks forward to seeing how others are cultivating the Arts in their communities and learning from this process.

Dr. Shelton Land

*Douglass Theatre
Macon, Bibb County*

With more than 15-years of leadership experience in the nonprofit and performing arts fields, Dr. Land brings his purpose-driven work ethic and vision to his role as Executive Director at the Douglass Theatre. A native of Virginia, Dr. Land earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mass Communication from Norfolk State University (NSU), a Master of Social Work Degree from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and a PhD in Public Policy & Administration with a concentration in Nonprofit Leadership and Management from Walden University.

Before joining the Douglass Theatre, Dr. Land served as Vice President of Education with United Way of Central Georgia (UWCG) and was responsible for leading the organization's birth-through-eight educational initiatives across 14-counties, with Macon-Bibb as one of the primary counties. During his tenure, he helped build and lead Read United, a key initiative that supports students with grade-level reading challenges. He increased this initiative to currently serve six school districts within UWCG's service area. He also helped launch and advance the AARP Foundation's Experience Corps intergenerational tutoring program in Central Georgia. Dr. Land is a Leadership Macon alumnus and has served as Artistic Director with the annual Atlanta Black Theatre Festival.

He has received various awards and accolades for his leadership and service in the nonprofit and theatre sectors. He credits his natural talent of making people laugh and his spiritual faith with helping him thrive as a leader while utilizing art as an educational tool to serve and help advance the community.

Sophia Sobrino

*High Museum of Art
Atlanta, Fulton County*

Sophia Sobrino currently serves as the Coordinator of Gallery Learning at the High Museum of Art in the Learning and Civic Engagement Department. In this role, she manages the day-to-day operations of the Museum's Docent Corps, supporting approximately 130 active and emeritus

docents who facilitate engaging guided experiences for K–12 students, adults, older adults, and family audiences. Sophia earned her Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art from Oglethorpe University.

Panel 4

Mandy Underwood

*Jenkins County Development Authority
Millen, Jenkins County*

Mandy Underwood has served as the Executive Director of the Jenkins County Development Authority and Chamber of Commerce since June 2013. Prior to this role, she led the Jenkins County Family Enrichment Center, Inc. as Executive Director for four years, where she worked to strengthen local families and expand community services.

Mandy earned her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting from Georgia Southern University. Her professional background includes 12 years as a Senior Accountant with Lisa M. Stone, CPA, PC in Rincon, Georgia, where she developed a strong foundation in financial management and organizational leadership.

Deeply committed to her community, Mandy is actively involved in numerous civic and service organizations. She is a longtime member of Millen Baptist Church (27 years), the Millen Woman's Club (16 years), Millen Rotary Club (15 years), and the Jenkins County Athletic Booster Club (12 years). Her leadership includes service as past president of the Millen Rotary Club, treasurer of the Woman's Club for 12 years, and a 14-year tenure on the Children's Committee at Millen Baptist Church.

Currently, Mandy serves on several boards and councils, including Millen Rotary Club (Board Member, 12 years); Jenkins County Athletic Booster Club (Treasurer, 12 years); CSRA Economic Opportunity Authority (Board Member, 2 years); Augusta Regional Development Alliance (Chairman, 5 years); Jenkins County 4-H Council (1 year); Jenkins County High School Improvement Team (2 years) and Jenkins County Council of Churches (Treasurer, 10 years).

Mandy is married to Bryan Underwood, and they are proud parents to two sons, Garrison (25) and Gavin (20). Her dedication to economic growth, community development, and civic engagement continues to make a lasting impact on Jenkins County.

Kristin Norton Green

*City of Canton
Canton, Cherokee County*

Kristin Norton Green has served as the City of Canton's Theatre Events and Facilities Director since 2019. She supports the Canton Cultural Arts Commission (CCAC) as Staff Liaison, and facilitated the development of the Canton's Public Art Master Plan. In 2022, Atlanta Regional Commission named her as an Arts Leader of Metro Atlanta.

Daniella Mendez

*Thronateeska Heritage Center
Albany, Dougherty County*

Daniella Mendez is the South Georgia Archives Manager at the Thronateeska Heritage Center, where she is responsible for the preservation, records management, and accessibility of regional historical collections. Her work emphasizes professional standards in archival practice, public history, and community engagement, with a commitment to broadening access to South Georgia's cultural heritage. She also maintains a strong focus on leadership development and strategic advancement within the cultural and nonprofit sectors.

Barbara Northrup

*Beach Cottage Photography
St. Simon's Island, Glynn County*

Barbara Northrup is a photographer, mixed media painter, and textile designer. She studied Interior and Space Design in San Francisco before moving to the Golden Isles of Georgia in 1994. She currently serves on the executive board of Glynn Visual Arts, a non-profit art association on St. Simon's Island.

Vickie Spivey

*The Plaza Arts Center
Eatonton, Putnam County*

Vickie Spivey is the Director of Programming and Theater Productions at The Plaza Arts Center. Her career and personal interests have always circled the non-profit, fine art, and performing arts world.

She would say that her customer service, creative, technical, and programming talents were honed while working for top-rated service-centric companies, such as Blackbaud and The Ritz-Carlton.

Vickie is a native of Eatonton, GA, attended Putnam County Schools, and holds a BS in Exercise Science/Kinesiology and a Minor in Communications from Georgia College and State University. Her roots are local, but she enjoys traveling and spending time with her family and friends. Her love for the Arts continues to grow as she is influenced by the richness and depth of artistic talent that lives here in the Lake Country of Georgia.

Panel 5**Justin Andrews**

*Otis Redding Foundation
Macon, Bibb County*

Justin Andrews, carrying the legacy of his legendary grandfather Otis Redding, holds the esteemed position of Director of Special Projects and Outreach at the Otis Redding Foundation. Focusing on event coordination and student engagement, Justin's dedication shines through his creative endeavors, such as curating Otis Redding-branded merchandise to fund educational

initiatives. His active involvement extends beyond the Foundation, where he presides over the Macon Film Festival's Board of Directors and supports various community organizations. Justin's commitment to youth echoes the passion of his grandfather, who believed in empowering future generations through education. Otis Redding's philanthropic spirit lives on through the foundation established in his honor by Mrs. Zelma Redding (Justin's grandmother), nurturing young talent and fostering opportunities in music and beyond. Justin embodies this legacy, channeling his love for music into tangible benefits for the community, just as his grandfather did decades ago.

Jessica Smith

Literary Artist

Athens, Clarke County

Jessica Smith is an Athens-based editor and journalist interested in documenting artist-built environments and self-taught artists. She works in communications at the Georgia Museum of Art, and previously served as the arts and music editor of the alt-weekly publication *Flagpole*. As a current member of the Athens Cultural Affairs Commission and former volunteer of the Athens Area Arts Council, she advocates for public art, creative placemaking, and community engagement in the arts.

Annie Vanoteghem

Albany Museum of Art

Albany, Dougherty County

Annie Vanoteghem has served as the Director of Education and Public Programming at the Albany Museum of Art since 2018, where she is dedicated to fostering meaningful community engagement through the arts. A practicing artist and passionate advocate for accessible arts education, Annie believes deeply in the power of creativity to connect, inspire, and strengthen communities. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Art History and Museum Studies from Georgia College & State University. Annie resides in Leesburg, Georgia, with her husband, Daniel, and their two daughters, Cecilia and Winifred.

Darius Williams

Professional Learning Specialist

Atlanta, Fulton County

Darius J. Williams is a native of Warrenton, GA, where he graduated from Warren County Schools in 2011. There, he discovered his love of the arts as a proud captain of the Marching Band and organizer of the community's HOPE and PRIDE Gospel Explosion, which brought together members of the CSRA community annually.

Darius's thirst for knowledge led him to Morehouse College, where he sang in the world-renowned Morehouse College Glee Club as he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education. He then pursued a Master of Education in Learning, Design, and Technology from the University of Georgia.

Having dedicated his life to the field of education, Darius has served as an elementary school teacher in Fulton County and an Education Specialist at Kennesaw State University. He now

serves as a Worldwide Education Specialist at Apple, leading his organization's mission to inspire 1.4 million educators across the globe annually.

As a result of his advocacy for equity in education and commitment to providing the youth of his city with high-quality learning experiences, Darius has been named to the prestigious LEAD Atlanta Class of 2024.

His creative talents now find expression through the Focused Brand, his business focusing on photography, graphic design, and book publishing. He has authored three children's books: "DJ's Favorite Day!" "Twinkle, Little Star!" and his newest book, "DJ Stands on Business."

Darius is grateful for the strong foundation he received as a kid growing up in rural Georgia with limited resources but an endless opportunity to express creativity in many ways. For these reasons, he continuously strives to be a beacon of leadership, an advocate for instructional technology, and a champion for creative expression through the arts.

Panel 6

Jillian Baxter

*Albany State University
Albany, Dougherty County*

Dr. Jillian Baxter is Chair of Arts and Humanities and Associate Professor of Music at Albany State University. Founded in 1903, Albany State University continues to provide leadership in academic excellence, social change, and economic impact. A nationally top-ranked HBCU, ASU serves an increasingly diverse student body and community by offering a uniquely comprehensive array of programs, from associate to graduate degrees.

Dr. Madia Cooper-Ashirifi

*Brenau University
Gainesville, Hall County*

Madia Cooper-Ashirifi, Ed.D., MFA, is a Liberian-American dance educator, choreographer, and performing artist whose work bridges West African traditions with contemporary dance forms. She is currently Chair and Associate Professor of Dance at Brenau University in Atlanta, Georgia, and also serves as a member of the Georgia Council of the Arts under the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

Karla Noble Lewis

*Baconton Community Charter School
Baconton, Mitchell County*

Karla Noble Lewis is a professional artist, arts advocate, and high school visual arts educator based in South Georgia with over 20 years of experience in the arts and art education. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Valdosta State University and a Master of Arts in Art and Design Education from Kennesaw State University. Lewis is an award-winning artist whose work has been featured in regional and statewide exhibitions. In addition to her teaching practice, she has extensive experience writing and managing grants for schools and nonprofit arts organizations,

supporting innovative programming, arts access, and creative opportunities in rural communities. She is passionate about strengthening arts education and fostering sustainable, community-centered arts initiatives.

Linda Parish

City of Lexington

Lexington, Oglethorpe County

Linda Parish is the Chair of the Historic Preservation Commission with the City of Lexington. The Downtown Development Authority works to strengthen and promote the economic health and vitality of Lexington.