Governor's Awards for the Arts and Humanities
Award Recipients 2012-2025

The below biographies contain information accurate at the time the awards were presented.

2025 Honorees

Atlanta Drum Academy (Atlanta)
Founded by James Riles III in 2011, the Academy empowers children in marginalized communities through percussion, mentorship, and personal development, with graduates going on to college, entrepreneurship, and professional performance.

Andy Gaines (Marietta)
Gaines has transformed Marietta's historic Earl and Rachel Smith Strand Theatre into a thriving cultural and economic asset while supporting arts education, youth mentorship, tourism, and community engagement.

Sherrill Milnes (Savannah)
Sherrill Milnes has enriched Savannah's vocal arts community through the Savannah VOICE Festival, mentoring and empowering young vocal artists through performance opportunities, education, and career development while bringing world-class talent to the city.

Okefenokee Cultural Center (Waycross)
This cultural center preserves and celebrates the history and creativity of eight rural Southeast Georgia counties through exhibits, educational programs, art competitions, and hands-on workshops that support artists, attract visitors, and strengthen community connections.

Sasikala Penumarthi (Duluth)
Penumarthi has shared the South Indian classical tradition of Kuchipudi with Georgia by training students, staging innovative productions, and leading workshops and master classes that expand access to and appreciation for this cultural tradition.

Dennis Skelley (Augusta)

Skelley has championed public art in Augusta, helping shape the city's first Public Art Master Plan and leading efforts to commission accessible public artworks, including 17 sculptures, four murals, and The 523 Gallery for artists with disabilities.

Luciana Spracher (Savannah)
Spracher has made Savannah's archives a model of community-centered history, securing more than $3 million for preservation and digitization while expanding public access through tours, lectures, and the Community Memory Project, which has documented more than 150 oral histories.

Suzi Bass Awards (Atlanta)
Celebrating excellence in Atlanta professional theater, these awards recognize artists and companies across more than 30 categories while fostering professional growth through workshops, panels, and networking that strengthen the region's theater community.

Tomer Zvulun (Atlanta)
Zvulun has transformed The Atlanta Opera through bold programming, expanded audiences, and innovative initiatives, including the Atlanta Opera Film Studio, Young Artists Studio, and award-winning 96-Hour Opera Festival, which support emerging artists and bring opera to audiences worldwide.

Union County Historical Society (Blairsville)
Established in 1976 to preserve Union County's history, the Society saved the 1899 courthouse and now uses it as a museum and community gathering place, offering exhibits, lectures, and events such as the Mountain Heritage Festival that bring local traditions to life.

Award Artist: Etienné Jackson (Fairburn)

2024 Honorees

The Art Center (Johns Creek)
The Art Center has fostered arts education and cultural engagement in north Fulton County since 1996, offering diverse classes, exhibitions, and outreach programs for youth, adults, and

underserved groups. The Art Center engages thousands in the community through free art events and fosters an inclusive space for creative exploration.

Elizabeth DuBose (Savannah)
DuBose significantly enhanced public engagement with Ossabaw Island's natural and cultural heritage by overseeing the restoration of historic sites, increasing educational program attendance, and fostering collaborations with universities.

Derrick J. Jackson (Atlanta)
Jackson, a celebrated trombonist and educator, advanced music education in Georgia while highlighting the African Diaspora's influence on American music.

Jon Ludwig (Atlanta)
As Emeritus Artistic Director of the Center for Puppetry Arts, Ludwig transformed the art of puppetry through decades of innovative productions, acclaimed designs, and lasting contributions to Atlanta's cultural landscape.

Melanie Pavich (St. Simons Island)
Pavich's research on race and gender in the 19th- and early 20th-century American South informs published scholarship and art installations while also empowering Mercer University students to document and preserve Gullah Geechee heritage along Georgia's coast.

Garry Pound (Columbus)
Pound is renowned for his portrait and landscape paintings and for longstanding contributions to historic preservation, local arts organizations, and community leadership.

William Fred Scott (Atlanta)
Scott, in addition to his accomplishments as a distinguished conductor and musician, helped shape Atlanta's musical landscape through leadership roles with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, The Atlanta Opera, and The Westminster Schools.

South Georgia Ballet (Thomasville)
Founded in 1998, South Georgia Ballet enriches southwest Georgia with exceptional ballet training, three high-caliber annual productions, and accessible arts education while fostering community engagement and offering opportunities for all ages and backgrounds, including underserved youth.

Dr. Randell E. Trammell (Atlanta)
A leader in youth and civic engagement, Trammell founded the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement and holds numerous leadership roles on civic and educational boards. Trammell was honored with awards like the Bill Bolling Nonprofit Leader of the Year and the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award, and participated in the Presidential Leadership Scholars program.

Patricia Webb (Blue Ridge)
A retired banking professional and arts advocate, Webb co-founded and has led Blue Ridge Community Theater in North Georgia for nearly 30 years, transforming it into a thriving hub for live theater with hundreds of annual performances, robust volunteer engagement, and a popular children's program.

Award Artist: Charles Pinckney (Athens)

2023 Honorees

Altama Museum of Art & History (Vidalia)
The museum is a vital regional arts and cultural institution that preserves local history, showcases regional artists, provides educational programs, and supports community connection and economic vitality.

Atlanta Dogwood Festival (Atlanta)
The Atlanta Dogwood Festival has celebrated Georgia's arts for decades while supporting artists, cultural organizations, and youth arts education through its annual festival, artist market, performances, exhibitions, and scholarships.

Ballethnic Dance (East Point)
The company has expanded opportunities in Georgia dance by blending classical ballet with African dance traditions and training and supporting generations of dancers and emerging artists.

Historic Rural Churches of Georgia (statewide)

The organization preserves the state's rural heritage by documenting historic churches through volunteer photography and research, creating a public online archive and an award-winning book, and partnering with Emory University and the Pitts Theology Library.

Otis Redding Foundation (Macon)
The foundation empowers young people, particularly those from underserved communities, through music and arts education programs that foster creativity, personal growth, and pathways to academic and professional success.

Jonathan SE Perkins (Muscogee County)
Perkins is an accomplished teaching artist, poet, actor, and activist who uses creativity and spoken word to empower Georgia's youth, promote personal growth, and strengthen communities.

Dr. Karan Berryman Pittman (Cuthbert)
Pittman helped revitalize downtown Cuthbert by preserving historic buildings, boosting tourism and community development, and bringing Andrew's College's fine arts programs into the heart of the community.

Harold Rittenberry (Athens)
Rittenberry is a self-taught Georgia sculptor whose distinctive welded artworks have enriched public spaces and cultural institutions across the state, including Centennial Olympic Park and the Georgia Museum of Art at the University of Georgia.

Morris Robinson (Atlanta)
Robinson, an acclaimed opera singer and graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Program, co-developed The Atlanta Opera's 96-Hour Opera Project to create opportunities for emerging BIPOC composers and librettists.

Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam (Atlanta)
Scogin and Elam, the two principals of Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects, Inc., have a career-long engagement with the Georgia arts communities, including projects with NEXUS (now Atlanta Contemporary), Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries, the High Museum of Art, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, MOCA GA.

Award Artist: Mark A. Nelson (Lake Sinclair)

2022 Honorees

Reverend Dr. Dwight D. Andrews (Atlanta)
Andrews has enriched Georgia's musical, spiritual, and cultural life through his work as an acclaimed educator, composer, minister, and arts leader, including collaborations on major Broadway productions and service to arts organizations statewide.

Tom Asher (Atlanta)
Asher helped shape the Atlanta History Center, the Atlanta University Center's Woodruff Library, the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, the Historic Oakland Foundation, and the Woodruff Arts Center.

Georgia Museums, Inc. (Bartow County)
The nonprofit organization directly improves the quality of life in Cartersville and for visitors by providing venues that encourage learning across the arts and humanities, creativity, engagement, and human understanding.

Annie Greene (LaGrange)
Greene, a lifelong Georgia educator, artist, and author, has inspired generations of students and demonstrated the transformative power of education and creativity with her innovative yarn art and teaching.

Jeff Green (Leesburg)
Green's teaching, acting, directing, and playwrighting strengthened Georgia Southwestern State University's academic offerings and community outreach.

Heartbound Ministries (Atlanta)
Supporting Georgia's prison communities through innovative programs in arts, education, mentoring, counseling, and life skills, Heartbound Ministries promotes hope, restoration, and positive change.

Christopher Moses (Atlanta)
Under his leadership, the education department at the Alliance Theatre has more than doubled its annual outreach, serving more than 100,000 children each year.

The Perry Area Historical Society (Perry)
The society preserves and shares local history through its museum, archives, publications, preservation projects, and educational programs, while using arts and theater partnerships to strengthen the Perry and Houston County community.

Alan Rothschild (Columbus)
Rothschild's advice and asset management leveraged philanthropy to support museums, historical societies, higher education institutions, and preservation groups for decades.

Thomasville Entertainment Foundation (Thomasville)
The foundation brings renowned performing arts to rural southwest Georgia while expanding access through affordable workshops, school programs, and scholarships.

Award Artist: James Downey (Fulton County)

2021 Honorees

Dad's Garage Theatre (Atlanta)
Dad's Garage Theatre has enriched Atlanta's arts community through original comedy and improv, arts education, and inclusive programming that engages new audiences, develops young people's skills, and supports emerging artists.

Didi Dunphy (Athens)
As program and facility supervisor at the Lyndon House Arts Center, Dunphy expanded access to visual arts, nurturing artists and underserved communities through educational programs and affordable studio spaces and materials.

Georgia Council on Economic Education (statewide)
Based in Atlanta, the Council has strengthened K–12 education in Georgia by equipping teachers with professional development and resources to integrate economic and financial literacy into the classroom, with a strong focus on rural communities.

The Hambidge Center for the Creative Arts & Sciences (Rabun Gap)
Since 1934, the Center has supported artists through its acclaimed residency program, providing space, resources, and fellowships that have nurtured Georgia and nationally recognized creative talent.

Sheffield Hale (Atlanta)
As President and CEO of the Atlanta History Center, Hale led the Confederate Monuments Initiative and developed guiding principles to help communities engage with history through broader perspectives.

Lyrika Holmes (Powder Springs)
Holmes is an internationally recognized harpist and founder of Artz for the Harp, a nonprofit that expands access to harp education, music enrichment, and music therapy programs for students of all ages.

Donald L. Lovette (Hinesville)
Liberty County native and playwright Lovette uses live theater to preserve local African American history while creating jobs and expanding community education through Love-It Productions.

Out of Hand Theater (Atlanta)
Out of Hand Theater combines art, social justice, and community engagement to address social justice issues, bringing thousands of Georgians together through performances, conversations, and educational programs focused on racial equity, incarceration, and human trafficking.

Synchronicity Theatre (Atlanta)
Synchronicity Theatre empowers women and girls through bold, community-focused theater, supporting women artists, developing new works, and providing educational and arts programs that reach thousands of Georgians each year.

Marquice L. Williams (Savannah)
Williams is an award-winning spoken-word artist and educator who uses poetry, creative writing, and performance to empower underserved youth and adults in emergency shelters and detention centers across Georgia.

Award Artist: Yvonne Jackson Grovner (Sapelo Island)

GOVERNOR'S AWARDS FOR THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

2020 Honorees

Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association (Blue Ridge)
From its inception as a festival of local artists, the Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association transformed Blue Ridge into a thriving arts destination by supporting hundreds of artists, fostering arts education and community programs, and growing its signature Arts in the Park festival into a major regional event.

Brian Brown (Fitzgerald)
Brown has documented and preserved Georgia's vanishing rural heritage through photography, public history, and an extensive archive of more than 7,000 locations, helping communities and future generations understand the state's history and culture.

Dr. Eddie Bennett (Decatur)
Bennett dedicated his career to Georgia education, advancing social studies instruction, professional development, and student mentoring while creating programs that help students succeed academically and pursue higher education.

Yvonne Jackson Grovner (Sapelo Island)
Yvonne Jackson Grovner has dedicated decades to preserving coastal Georgia's cultural heritage by mastering and teaching the traditional art of sweetgrass basket making while sharing Sapelo Island's history and traditions through tours and community education.

Kevin Cole (Atlanta)
Cole is an acclaimed Georgia artist and educator whose internationally recognized work spans hundreds of exhibitions, public art commissions, and major museum collections, including the High Museum of Art and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Jim Hammond (Gainesville)
Through decades of leadership and teaching, Hammond built the Gainesville Theatre Alliance into a nationally acclaimed program, which has mentored generations of successful theater professionals.

William S. Morris III (Augusta)

William S. “Billy” Morris III has advanced Augusta’s cultural and civic life through philanthropy and leadership, founding the Morris Museum of Art, supporting arts education and revitalization, and establishing scholarships and endowed chairs across Georgia.

Susan Majette Murphy (Darien)
Susan Murphy, an acclaimed performer, has advanced aerial dance in Georgia through her teaching, performance, and leadership in founding Canopy Studio in Athens and The Marsh Studio on the Georgia coast, creating spaces for aerial arts education and performance.

Museum of Arts and Sciences (Macon)
The museum serves as a regional cultural asset and center of excellence for lifelong learning and enrichment, offering immersive art, science, history, nature experiences, and innovative STEAM programs to visitors and students throughout Georgia.

Maestro Robert Spano (Atlanta)
Spano has elevated Georgia’s musical profile through his acclaimed leadership of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, while championing contemporary American composers, mentoring emerging musicians, and connecting audiences with music through performance and education.

Award Artists: Chelsea Rathburn (Macon), Tennille D. Shuster (Macon)

2019 Honorees

Lucinda W. Bunnen (Atlanta)
Lucinda W. Bunnen changed the face of Georgia’s arts community as a photographer, collector, and philanthropist. She co-founded Nexus, now known as Atlanta Contemporary, and Atlanta Celebrates Photography (ACP), a cornerstone of the Atlanta arts community.

Common Good Atlanta (Greater Atlanta Region)
Common Good Atlanta provides college courses to incarcerated people. Founded in 2008 by Dr. Sarah Higinbotham and Bill Taft, Common Good has engaged more than 100 volunteer professors from Georgia universities to provide more than 4,000 hours of college-level

humanities instruction, with more than 200 men and women completing one of its more than 35 full-semester courses.

Hermina Glass-Hill (Kennesaw)
Hermina Glass-Hill's career as a public historian, writer, and artist spans more than 25 years, with work focused on African American cultural education through performance art, multimedia presentations, oral histories, and publications. She has demonstrated her commitment to uplifting, sharing, and preserving African American culture across Georgia by drawing on the state's history to tell new stories.

Christopher Johnson (Columbus)
Christopher Johnson is a regionally celebrated visual artist whose public murals have brought renewed interest to communities across Georgia. His murals draw on local history and celebrate southwest Georgia's contributions to American culture and history, sparking discussions about community identity.

Madison-Morgan Conservancy (Madison)
For nearly two decades, the Madison-Morgan Conservancy has worked to conserve and protect historic, natural, and agricultural resources in Morgan County, with the goal of preserving the county's quality of life and sense of place. The Conservancy accomplishes this through partnerships, public education, identifying and documenting threatened resources, and innovative tools to protect those resources.

Jessye Norman School of the Arts (Augusta)
The Jessye Norman School of the Arts (JNSA) has impacted thousands of children and families in the greater Augusta area through a comprehensive, tuition-free after-school arts program for students of limited resources. The program helps students develop and nurture their artistic and creative talents, with JNSA students consistently outperforming their peers academically and graduating from high school.

Kathy Prescott and Grady Thrasher (Athens)
Kathy Prescott and Grady Thrasher have shaped the arts and humanities communities in Athens for 15 years through projects and programs focused on literacy, artmaking, and youth development. They have also been actively engaged in philanthropy and improving the local quality of life, with a focus on the arts, education, and social progress.

Rick McKnight (Columbus)

Rick McKnight supported Columbus' arts and education communities through programmatic, philanthropic, and fundraising efforts, including an annual Teachers Institute that provides arts-in-education instruction for Muscogee County School District teachers. As founding chair of the Columbus Cultural Arts Alliance, he helped designate a portion of the lodging tax for arts initiatives that contribute to tourism and economic development, directing more than $2 million to local arts agencies.

Mercer University Press (Macon)
Founded in 1979, Mercer University Press is a nonprofit book publisher based at Mercer University in Macon with a mission to make scholarly investigation and literary excellence available to the worldwide community. The Press has published more than 1,500 books, with the majority of its works relating to Georgia and the South, including southern history, civil rights, the Civil War, food, music, and sports.

Angelica Hairston (Atlanta)
Angelica Hairston is an accomplished harpist who has performed on national and international stages, including with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Nashville Symphony Orchestra, and Daytona Solisti Chamber Orchestra. Since 2015, she has served as artistic director of the Urban Youth Harp Ensemble, providing free before- and after-school harp lessons and mentorship programs for students and families.

Award Artist: Cecel Allee (Athens)

2018 Honorees

The Activities Council of Thomson (Thomson)
For 40 years, the Activities Council of Thomson has served as a central hub for arts and culture in McDuffie County and the surrounding rural counties in east-central Georgia. The organization presents the Blind Willie McTell Blues Festival and other community events, using festival proceeds to support artists in schools, the Thomson High School band, and additional arts programs.

Atlanta Ballet (Atlanta)
Atlanta Ballet is the oldest continually operating ballet company in the country and has grown into one of the nation's premier dance companies. Designated the Official Ballet of the State of Georgia in 1973, Atlanta Ballet has served as a cultural ambassador through international

collaborations and touring, while expanding access to dance education through programs such as its Center for Dance Education and Kids in Step.

Syd Blackmarr (Tifton)
For almost 40 years, Syd Blackmarr has been a leader in developing and expanding cultural arts programs, networks, and infrastructure across South Georgia. Her work fostered the creation of eight local arts councils, Georgia's first rural arts consortium, arts-in-education programs in six counties, and festivals that promoted cultural diversity, while building partnerships that brought support for arts and humanities programs to rural counties across South Georgia.

Brenau University (Gainesville)
For 135 years, Brenau University has emphasized the importance of the arts and humanities in the lives of students and the Gainesville and Northeast Georgia communities. Its commitment includes public art, readings, lectures, book discussions, the Northeast Georgia History Center, the Gainesville Theatre Alliance, and the Brenau Collection, a permanent collection featuring works by artists including Renoir and Cézanne.

Center for Civil and Human Rights (Atlanta)
The opening of the Center for Civil and Human Rights in 2014 marked the culmination of seven years of programming, planning, fundraising, and the development of a national resource for dialogue about human rights. The Center's exhibits and programs use art, multimedia, and sensory technology to connect Georgia's civil and human rights history to broader stories, with support from diverse business, civic, educational, and philanthropic partnerships.

Freedom Singers (Albany)
For more than 50 years, the Freedom Singers have demonstrated the power of music as a force for positive social change, beginning with four college student activists who used song to educate communities about civil rights issues. The contemporary group, established in 1998 under the leadership of original member Rutha Harris, continues to share the history of the Civil Rights Movement through performances at schools, colleges, universities, museums, and national tours.

Leslie Gordon (Atlanta)
For more than 30 years, Leslie Gordon has led organizations and programs demonstrating how the arts and humanities contribute to community building, education, and economic

development. Her work has included directing the City of Savannah's Bureau of Cultural Affairs; organizing multidisciplinary festivals, including the Cultural Olympiad, Arts Festival of Atlanta, and National Black Arts Festival; and leading the Rialto Center for the Arts at Georgia State University as a place for cultural exchange.

Fred and Dinah Gretsch (Savannah)
Through the Gretsch Foundation, Fred and Dinah Gretsch have supported music education, scholarships, museum outreach, and music programs in Georgia, including the Savannah Folk Music Festival, Gretsch Institute, and programs at Georgia Southern University and the Bulloch County Boys & Girls Club.

Paul Hudson (Clarkston)
Through teaching, publications, and public programs, Paul Hudson has engaged thousands of Georgians in history and the humanities for almost 30 years. His work includes organizing programs highlighting Georgia founder James Edward Oglethorpe, founding the International Time Capsule Society, publishing two books and numerous articles, and writing more than 300 "nearby history" columns for DeKalb County newspapers.

Meridian Herald (Atlanta)
Meridian Herald brings together music, literary, and storytelling traditions from Georgia's past to strengthen public appreciation for the state's cultural heritage. The organization discovers lesser-known Georgia traditions and presents them through public programs and recordings, including the annual Atlanta Music Festival, sharing Georgia history and traditions with contemporary audiences.

Carl Purdy (Augusta)
For almost 30 years, Carl Purdy has contributed to Augusta's music and cultural environment as a performer, singer, teacher, festival organizer, and instrument builder. His work spans performances with symphonies, string quartets, jazz, bluegrass, and rock groups, as well as teaching music and humanities at Augusta University and researching how music heals in collaboration with colleagues in the medical school.

Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies (Athens)
The Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies at the University of Georgia has documented Georgia's modern politics and policy development as the first institution of its kind in the Southeast. Its collections, which number more than 350, document the evolution of state and national policy and include the work of political leaders as well as grassroots and civic groups that have shaped new policy directions.

Douglas Scott (Atlanta)
For 30 years, Douglas Scott has been a leader in modern dance and, as founder of Full Radius Dance Company, has created opportunities for dancers with and without disabilities in Georgia, across the United States, and internationally. He also founded the Modern Atlanta Dance Festival, which has brought more than 65 acclaimed companies and dancers to Georgia, and has used his work as an artist and arts administrator to raise awareness of inclusion in the arts.

2017 Honorees

Karen Berman (Milledgeville)
Dr. Karen Berman's pioneering work as an arts advocate, scholar, author, and proponent of theater for social change has strengthened the Milledgeville and Baldwin County community. As chair of the Georgia College & State University Department of Theatre and Dance in Milledgeville, Berman has worked to make the theater program one of the best in the nation. Through Berman's leadership, the theatre and dance department instituted "Pathways for Engagement for All Theatre Majors," a program that allows college students to engage with youth in the schools of Washington County and Baldwin County.

Valerie Boyd (Athens/Atlanta)
As the Charlayne Hunter-Gault Distinguished Writer in Residence at the University of Georgia Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, Boyd co-directs the college's successful low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Narrative Media Writing. Boyd is the author of the critically acclaimed "Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston," for which she received the Georgia Author of the Year Award in nonfiction, an American Library Association Notable Book Award, and the Southern Book Award for best nonfiction book of the year.

William Eiland (Athens)

William has been the director of the Georgia Museum of Art, the official state art museum, since 1992. Under his stewardship, the museum has grown its programming, staff, and permanent collection, as well as established a decorative arts program, the Henry D. Green Center for the Study of the Decorative Arts. Eiland has emphasized the museum's role as the official state art museum of Georgia, maintaining a policy of free admission.

Gilmer Arts and Heritage Association (Ellijay)
The Gilmer Arts and Heritage Association has made an impact on the arts in Gilmer County for almost 40 years, with a mission of promoting passionate interest and active participation in the arts sector. Gilmer Arts provides more than 300 classes for adults and children in art, music, and dance, and brings cultural events to the people of Gilmer County and north Georgia in the visual, literary, and performing arts.

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport Art Program (Atlanta)
Since 1997, the Airport Art Program has showcased approximately eight exhibits per year in its Atrium Gallery, and has purchased more than 150 pieces of artwork to add to the airport's collection. Through the commissioned art program, many Georgia artists have had the opportunity to create large-scale artwork and venture into the realm of public art, and about 400 Georgia K-12 students each year have their art seen by travelers from all over the world.

Virginia Hepner (Atlanta)
An advocate for public arts funding, Virginia served as CEO of the Woodruff Arts Center from 2012-2017, increasing endowments and reducing its debt. She also led the successful completion of the Arts Center's Transformation Campaign, a $100 million fundraising initiative, and focused on arts education and increasing access to the arts for families.

Kenny Leon (Atlanta)
Kenny Leon is a Tony Award-winning Broadway and film director. A graduate of Clark Atlanta University, Leon served as artistic director of the Alliance Theatre for 11 years, and is a co-founder and artistic director of True Colors Theatre Company, where he serves as artistic director. He also extended the theatre's impact with the National August Wilson Monologue Competition for high school students.

Lowndes-Valdosta Arts Commission, Inc., dba Turner Center for the Arts (Valdosta)
The admission-free Turner Center is a hub for the arts and humanities in south central Georgia that provides exhibitions, educational programs, and free workshops, and performances, with a goal to reach underserved community members. One noteworthy result of this effort is the Hal

& Jill Project, which provides guitars and free instruction for students who cannot afford private lessons.

Pearl McHaney (Decatur)
Dr. Pearl McHaney is the current Kenneth M. England Professor of Southern Literature at Georgia State University (GSU) and the former director of GSU's Center for Collaborative and International Arts (CENCIA). McHaney's work expands educational opportunities as she strives to increase public understanding of the role that the humanities play in everyday life. She opened Atlanta's arts community to GSU students through her championing of reduced-fee access to arts events and increased art and music events on campus.

National Infantry Museum Foundation (Columbus)
Chronicling the history of the U.S. Army infantryman from the American Revolution to Afghanistan, the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center exhibits artifacts from all eras of American history and contains interactive multimedia exhibits. Education is a vital part of the museum's work, and a team of historians and educators has created fun, informative, and interactive museum tours along with a variety of special programs.

Janisse Ray (Reidsville)
Janisse Ray is a writer, naturalist, and activist from South Georgia. She was inducted into the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame in 2015 and has written six books, including "Ecology of a Cracker Childhood," "Wild Card Quilt," and "Drifting into Darien," which have won many awards. Ray frequently shares her experiences with students and library groups and volunteers as chair of the Tattnall County Archives.

Lois Reitzes (Atlanta)
Since 1979, Reitzes's distinctive voice has been imparting her extensive knowledge and love of classical music on Atlanta's National Public Radio station, WABE (90.1 FM). Since 2015, she has hosted "City Lights with Lois Reitzes," a groundbreaking weekday arts and culture program with a specific mission of elevating Atlanta's arts scene. Individuals, stories, organizations, and events featured on "City Lights" have reported increased attendance, ticket sales, community involvement, and greater philanthropic support.

Award Artists: Laura B. Cooper, Glenn Dair, Kathryne Gould, Matthew Henderson, Sheryl Holstein, Chris Kelly, Adriana Richard, John Roberts, DeWitt Smith, Curtis Stewardson, Rebekah Strickland, Alice Woodruff

2016 Honorees

Aurora Theatre (Lawrenceville)
Aurora Theatre has become a cornerstone of Gwinnett County's cultural and economic revitalization, providing professional theater, arts education, career opportunities, and inclusive programming that serves tens of thousands of residents and visitors annually.

The Beach Institute (Savannah)
Serving Savannah for more than 150 years as an educational and cultural institution, the Institute preserves and celebrates African American history, art, and heritage through exhibitions, performances, lectures, and community partnerships.

The Bowdon Area Historical Society (Bowdon)
This group has preserved and shared Bowdon's history for decades through publications, exhibitions, oral histories, and community research, including a significant effort to document the area's African American educational heritage.

Lisa Cremin (Atlanta)
Cremin has served her community as a strategic planner, leader, mentor, and advocate, strengthening the metro Atlanta arts community through innovative philanthropy, financial support, and resources that have helped arts organizations thrive and adapt.

Lee Harper (Atlanta)
Harper has made a lasting impact on Georgia dance through decades of performance, choreography, teaching, and mentorship, inspiring thousands of students and launching generations of dancers and arts leaders.

Alvin D. Jackson (Savannah)
Jackson has championed the preservation of African American history and heritage in Bulloch County through the Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center, protecting historic schools and sites while fostering community, cultural, educational, and public health initiatives.

Macon Arts Alliance (Macon)
The organization has strengthened Macon-Bibb County's arts ecosystem and economic vitality by supporting artists and arts organizations, fostering collaboration and professional development, and using creative placemaking to revitalize East Macon while addressing community needs.

The Museum School of Avondale Estates (Avondale Estates)
The museum has pioneered an innovative, arts- and humanities-centered approach to public education through project-based learning, museum partnerships, and hands-on programs that have become a model for schools across Georgia and the nation.

Paula Peace (Atlanta)
Peace shaped Georgia's chamber music community through decades of performance, leadership, education, and mentorship, cofounding the Atlanta Chamber Players and championing contemporary composers and music education across the state and Southeast.

Steve Quesinberry (Newnan)
Quesinberry inspired generations of students at Newnan High School by connecting history education with community service, veterans' experiences, and civic engagement, and by developing nationally recognized programs and resources for educators.

Betty Foy Sanders (Statesboro)
While serving in the 1960s as Georgia's 74th First Lady, Sanders championed Georgia's arts and arts education for decades, establishing the Georgia Council for the Arts and Humanities, supporting Georgia Southern University, promoting Georgia artists, and sharing her own artwork statewide.

Larry Walker (Atlanta)
Walker has made a lasting impact on Georgia's visual arts community through his acclaimed career as an artist and educator, including leadership at Georgia State University and exhibitions and collections at major museums nationwide.

Award Artist: Shaunté Francois (Stone Mountain)

GOVERNOR'S AWARDS FOR THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

2015 Honorees

Libby Bailey (Macon)
A teacher, art historian, artist, and art preservationist and professor at Wesleyan College, whose conservation efforts made lasting impacts in Georgia art history.

Susan V. Booth (Atlanta)
Her visionary leadership at the Alliance Theatre elevated Atlanta's arts community through nationally recognized productions, innovative programs for youth and emerging playwrights, and meaningful support for artists across multiple disciplines.

Brenda Bynum (Atlanta)
Educator, director, and advocate Brenda made an enduring impact on Georgia theater through more than 60 productions, decades of teaching and mentorship, and acclaimed work across stage, television, and radio.

Jerry and Kathy Chappelle (Watkinsville)
They fostered Georgia's arts and cultural economy through Happy Valley Pottery, supporting hundreds of artists while advancing arts education, tourism, and local entrepreneurship in Oconee County.

Dr. James C. Cobb (Atlanta)
A distinguished Georgia historian whose acclaimed scholarship, teaching, writing, and public engagement have shaped the understanding of Southern history, culture, and identity.

Dave Dyer (Blue Ridge)
A World War II veteran who played a pivotal role in preserving and promoting Fannin County's history while strengthening Blue Ridge's tourism and community through decades of civic leadership and service.

Foxfire (Mountain City)
A nationally recognized model for place-based education that empowers Georgia students to preserve and share the history, culture, and artistic traditions of their communities through research, oral histories, and student publications.

The Pasaquan Preservation Society (Buena Vista)
The Society preserved and advanced Georgia's unique artistic heritage by protecting the Pasaquan site and ensuring its restoration, public access, and continued educational use.

Joyce Perdue-Smith (Rome)
Her research, advocacy, and leadership saved the historic Fairview School and African American schools in the era of segregation and uncovered valuable historical events that shaped the local community in Cave Spring.

Mausiki Scales (Atlanta)
An accomplished musician, composer, educator, and community leader, Scales uses music, scholarship, and storytelling to preserve and illuminate African American history and culture.

Slow Exposures (Zebulon)
Slow Exposures celebrates and preserves the culture and history of the rural South through photography, education, and community engagement while supporting the preservation of historic buildings in Pike County.

Telfair Museums (Savannah)
A pioneering force in Georgia's arts community, Telfair Museums combine an acclaimed collection and exhibitions with innovative education, outreach, and community programs that make the arts accessible to audiences across Savannah and beyond.

Robert Webb (Dalton)
Championed accessible literature, visual arts, and arts education through decades of leadership, philanthropy, and community service, including founding a nationally respected literary publication and creating a permanent public sculpture garden.

Award Artist: Matt Janke (Atlanta)

2014 Honorees

Athens Ciné (Athens)

Friends of Historic Jekyll Island (Jekyll Island)

Historic Oakland Foundation (Atlanta)

Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Collection (Atlanta)

National Black Arts Festival (Atlanta)

Pearl Cleage (Atlanta)

James S. Crisp (Macon)

Janice Faircloth (Thomasville)

Azira G. Hill (Atlanta)

Ellen Thompson (Dalton)

2013 Honorees

Kay Beck (Atlanta)
She played a pivotal role in shaping Georgia's film, media, and digital arts industries through her leadership at the Digital Arts Entertainment Lab at Georgia State University.

The Center for Puppetry Arts (Atlanta)
The organization has enriched Georgia's cultural and educational landscape by providing performances, museum experiences, workshops, and innovative distance learning programs that have reached hundreds of thousands of learners in Georgia and beyond.

Colquitt County Arts Center (Moultrie)
The Center made quality visual arts, performing arts, and arts education programs available to the diverse residents of Southwest Georgia while supporting community vitality, economic development, and historic preservation.

Linda Crowe Chesnut (Athens)

Her work with major cultural institutions, including the establishment of the Henry D. Green Center, expanded statewide understanding of material culture and enriched Georgia's historical and artistic legacy.

Dr. John Ferling (Carrolton)
A well-published professor of the University of West Georgia, he brought the history of America's founding and Revolutionary War to students and audiences in Georgia and beyond.

The Fox Theatre Institute (Atlanta)
The Institute has strengthened historic theaters across Georgia by providing preservation expertise, nonprofit management resources, grants, touring performances, and collaborative opportunities for communities large and small.

Melissa Fay Greene (Atlanta)
She is an acclaimed Georgia author whose award-winning books illuminate pivotal social issues and historical conflicts, while her speaking and outreach have inspired readers, students, educators, and communities.

Tim Howard (Chatsworth)
Tim Howard has dedicated his career to preserving and sharing Murray County's history and traditions through research, education, museum development, and community support for historic sites and programs.

Marianne Lambert (Atlanta)
Lambert has been a cornerstone of Georgia's contemporary arts community, championing and advancing the careers of countless artists through curatorial leadership, exhibitions, education, and support for the acquisition of Georgia artists' work.

Chuck Leavell (Dry Branch)
Leavell has enriched Georgia's cultural and civic life through his acclaimed music career, community service, environmental advocacy, and efforts to celebrate the state's musical heritage and natural environment.

Frank Maloy (Tifton)

He dedicated his life to preserving and sharing Georgia's musical traditions through performance, mentorship, community gatherings, and his unique collection of fiddle tunes representing all 159 Georgia counties.

Moving in the Spirit (Atlanta)
Empowered hundreds of Atlanta-area youths through nationally recognized dance education programs that foster skill development, self-expression, community building, and academic success.

Merryll Penson (Athens)
Merryll Penson has transformed Georgia's library and cultural landscape by leading innovative digital initiatives that preserve and provide broad public access to the state's humanities, history, and arts resources.

The United Shape Note Singers (Atlanta)
This group has preserved and shared the African American tradition of Shape Note Singing in West Georgia through fellowship, performances, recordings, and oral histories.

Allan Vigil (Morrow)
Vigil strengthened Georgia's arts and higher education communities through decades of philanthropy and volunteer leadership, supporting Spivey Hall, Arts Clayton's arts education programs, and strategic planning for the University System of Georgia.

Award Artist: Diane Kirkland (Atlanta)

2012 Honorees

Arthur Berry (Albany)
Berry enriched Georgia's cultural landscape through his artistic leadership, teaching, and community engagement, with public works such as "From Soil to Sun" that inspired generations and became an iconic HBCU landmark.

Annette Cone-Skelton (Atlanta)
She founded the Museum of Contemporary Art Georgia, MOCA GA, to support Georgia's contemporary artists and document the history of their work.

Colonel Bruce Hampton (Atlanta)

Hampton was a pioneering force in Georgia's music and arts communities whose innovative style influenced generations of art-rock and jam-band musicians while also shaping the state's performance art, poetry, spoken word, and film scenes.

Akbar Imhoetep (Atlanta)
Renowned Atlanta storyteller Imhotep shared African and Geechee folktales across the Southeast through festivals and library programs while mentoring emerging teaching artists and inspiring future generations of storytellers.

Thomas Lux (Atlanta)
Lux created Poetry @ Tech, a nationally respected program at Georgia Institute of Technology, to expand access to poetry through free workshops, mentorship, and his acclaimed literary achievements.

Philip Moulthrop (Marietta)
One of the world's most renowned woodturners, Moulthrop preserved a family legacy while pioneering innovative techniques that showcase the beauty of southeastern woods in major museums and institutions, including the White House.

Paul Pierce (Columbus)
Pierce strengthened arts and community development across west-central Georgia by transforming the Springer Opera House into a thriving regional theater, expanding performer training opportunities, and building partnerships throughout the state.

Amy Lotson Roberts (St. Simons Island)
Through her leadership of the St. Simons African American Heritage Coalition, Roberts has preserved and shared the island's African American and Geechee heritage through historic preservation, cultural programs, and educational tours, ensuring these legacies endure for future generations.

Savannah Music Festival (Savannah)
The Festival has become a world-class celebration of music in Savannah, bringing artists and audiences together while advancing arts education, economic growth, and tourism through performances and year-round community programs.

Melvin Steely (Carrollton)
Steely expanded access to Georgia's political history by creating the Georgia Political Heritage Program, which preserves and makes publicly available the papers and oral histories of key

elected officials through the Digital Library of Georgia, fostering civic understanding for future generations.

Kay and Dean Swanson (Cornelia)
Lifelong Cornelia residents Kay and Dean Swanson have strengthened Northeast Georgia's cultural heritage through their philanthropy, including the creation and endowment of the Folk Pottery Museum at the Sautee Nacoochee Center and support for Piedmont University's Swanson Center.

Thomaston-Upton Archives (Thomaston)
The Archives preserve vital community records, personal papers, and historic collections that illuminate centuries of local and Georgia history. Its holdings – ranging from 19th-century documents to materials on longstanding traditions and military service – support significant research while strengthening the community's cultural identity.

Award Artist: Matt Moulthrop (Atlanta)