

ALAMEDA COUNTY ARTS COMMISSION

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PRESS RELEASE

**Announcing the 2026 Alameda County Arts Leadership Award Recipients and
Alameda County Board of Supervisors' Commendation Event on October 6, 2026**

(Oakland, CA) – The [Alameda County Arts Commission](https://arts.acgov.org) is pleased to announce that the 2026 Alameda County Arts Leadership Award recipients are Samara Atkins, Ariam Weldeab Araya, Randolph Belle, Faye Carol, Dorsi Diaz, Carl Gorringer, Janet Heller, and Margaret Thornberry.

The eight arts leaders are being recognized for their achievements and contributions positively impacting the arts community and residents of Alameda County. The award recipients will be honored by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors with commendations presented in conjunction with the County's celebration of October as National Arts and Humanities Month. The commendations will be presented during the Board of Supervisors' meeting on Tuesday, October 6, at 3:00 PM. Members of the public may participate in-person at the County Board Chambers located at 1221 Oak Street, 5th Floor, in Oakland. Alternatively, members of the public may choose to view the meeting and participate remotely through Zoom teleconferencing. For information about the meeting, please visit the Alameda County Board of Supervisors' website at bos.alamedacountyca.gov.

Each year the appointed members of the Alameda County Arts Commission review nominations submitted by the public for the Alameda County Arts Leadership Award program and then select the award recipients. The goal each year is to select one individual or team from each of the five supervisorial districts. This year,

a team of two was selected for District 2 and there were tie-votes in Districts 3 and 5, resulting in additional awards, bringing the total to eight recipients. The Alameda County Arts Commission acknowledges all of the individuals who were nominated for this award program. Additionally, the Arts Commission thanks the Alameda County community members who submitted the nominations.



Margaret Thornberry is the Arts Leadership Award recipient for District One of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Margaret Thornberry is a dedicated community volunteer, arts advocate, and long-time supporter of the city of Fremont's cultural development. For more than 25 years, she has contributed significantly to establishing and advancing arts organizations, initiatives, and events throughout the city. She served multiple terms as President of the Fremont Cultural Arts Council and played an instrumental role in founding Fremont Creates, Fremont Arts Now, and the Center Theater Preservation Group. She also represented Supervisorial District 1 on the Alameda County Arts Commission. Through her leadership, she has strengthened Fremont's cultural infrastructure and broadened access to artistic expression, ensuring the arts remain integral to the community's identity. Margaret Thornberry is a resident of Fremont.



Dorsi Diaz and Carl Gorringer are the Arts Leadership Award recipient for District Two of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Dorsi Diaz has served in leadership roles at Hayward's Sun Gallery for more than a decade, and is currently the Board President and volunteer Interim Co-Executive Director and Curator. Carl Gorringer is a long-time Sun Gallery Board Member and volunteer Interim Co-Executive Director, and he is also the Co-Founder of Hayward Lit Hop. Together, Doris and Carl have advanced the stability and revitalization of the Sun Gallery, one of Hayward's longest-serving arts institutions. Their collaboration has expanded arts education, preserved legacy exhibitions, and deepened community engagement. Their leadership reflects a shared commitment to cultural enrichment and has significantly strengthened Hayward's artistic vitality and opportunities for public participation. Doris and Carl are residents of Hayward.



Samara Atkins is one of two Arts Leadership Award recipients for District Three of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Samara Atkins is a choreographer, dancer, performer, and hip-hop instructor dedicated to using dance to express, connect, celebrate, and heal through lived experiences. She is the Co-Founder and Co-Artistic Director of Mix'd Ingrdnts, a company committed to educating, inspiring, and empowering women, youth, and the community. Samara and her dance crew have been featured on the Harry Connick Jr. show and KQED. She is also a Senior Teaching Artist and Mentor at Destiny Arts Center, and she is a choreographer, performer, and singer/songwriter with Oakland's Alphabet Rockers, a GRAMMY-winning children's music group. Her work advances inclusive arts education and strengthens community throughout Alameda County. Samara is a resident of Oakland.



Janet Heller is one of two Arts Leadership Award recipients for District Three of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Janet Heller is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Chapter 510, a youth writing, bookmaking, and publishing center in Oakland. Now in its thirteenth year, the organization serves as a cultural anchor in the East Bay, employing local writers as teaching artists and demonstrating the power of literary arts to heal community divides, empower underserved youth, and preserve diverse cultural narratives. Through its programs, Chapter 510 has published more than 110 youth-authored books and supported over 6,500 young writers. Janet's leadership during the last three decades has strengthened Oakland and the Bay Area's literary ecosystem, expanded creative opportunities for youth, and ensured that community voices are uplifted and sustained. Janet is a resident of Oakland.



Randolph Belle is the Arts Leadership Award recipient for District Four of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Randolph Belle is an artist, entrepreneur, and community development strategist with more than 35 years of experience building sustainable creative ecosystems throughout Alameda County and beyond. As Founder of EVOAK!, RBA Creative, and Creative Development Partners, he has launched multiple commercial art spaces, including the first gallery in Oakland's Uptown Arts District. He has advanced arts policy, led cultural research for major foundations, and supported equitable cultural planning efforts. His work emphasizes creative

place-keeping and the arts as a tool for systemic change. His leadership has engaged a large and diverse network of artists, strengthened many arts and cultural organizations, and positively connected community members to meaningful cultural participation. Randolph is a resident of Oakland.



Ariam Weldeab Araya one of two Arts Leadership Award recipients for District Five of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Ariam Weldeab Araya is an artist, author, filmmaker, poet, performer, and mental health advocate whose multidisciplinary work spans film, literature, and media arts. She contributes meaningful leadership and collaboration to Oakland-based organizations, the Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants and ARTogether.

Both organizations support refugee and immigrant communities through arts-based engagement and comprehensive services designed to foster healing, empowerment, and compassionate community building. She founded Storytelling for Healing and actively promotes cultural dialogue and wellness through creative expression. Ariam's work in film, literature, and media arts has been recognized with numerous national and international awards. Her influence continues to strengthen resilience and community well-being. Ariam is a resident of Oakland.



Faye Carol is one of two Arts Leadership Award recipients for District Five of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Faye Carol is a vocalist, performer, educator, and recording artist whose six-decade career includes international performances and collaborations with major figures in music. She founded the School of The Getdown in 2000 to advance and celebrate Black arts and share cultural traditions throughout Alameda County, particularly with youth.

The organization reaches thousands annually through programs such as the Black Women's Roots Festival, Black Music Month Festival, and the Youth Arts Camp. A prolific artist, she has released 11 albums, contributed to many others, and continues performing at venues including Yoshi's, Stanford University, and the SFJAZZ Center. Her work uplifts the performing arts and strengthens community connections, contributing significantly to cultural vitality across Alameda County and beyond. Faye is a resident of Berkeley.

For more information about the program or the award recipients, please contact the Alameda County Arts Commission at (510) 208-9646 or by email at artscommission@acgov.org