

ALAMEDA COUNTY ARTS COMMISSION

1106 Madison Street, Suite 336, Oakland, CA 94607
www.acgov.org/arts artscommission@acgov.org

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Contact Person: Rachel Osajima, Director, (510) 271-5162 rachel.osajima@acgov.org

PRESS RELEASE

**Alameda County Arts Commission announces the recipients of the
2019 Alameda County Arts Leadership Award**

Alameda County Board of Supervisors Honor Award Recipients on Tuesday, October 1, 2019

(Oakland, CA) – The Alameda County Arts Commission is pleased to recognize six individuals for their achievements and contributions impacting the arts community and residents of Alameda County. The following individuals are the recipients of the 2019 Alameda County Arts Leadership Award: Kendra Barnes and Laura Elaine Ellis (joint award), Bee Chow, Suzanne Gayle, James Gayles, and Rob Jackson. The six award recipients will be honored by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors with a commendation ceremony presented in conjunction with the County’s celebration of National Arts and Humanities Month. The ceremony will take place during the Board’s public meeting on Tuesday, October 1, 10:45am at the Alameda County Administration Building, Supervisors’ Chambers, 1221 Oak Street, 5th Floor, Oakland. This event is open to the public.

Each year the Members of the Alameda County Arts Commission review nominations for the Arts Leadership Award submitted by the public and select the award recipients. The Alameda County Arts Commission acknowledges all of the nominees for providing leadership in the arts and serving as role models to others. Additionally, the Arts Commission thanks the Alameda County community members who submitted nominations.



Supervisorial District One

Bee Chow of Fremont, representing Supervisorial District One. Bee Chow is the founder of Cantabella Children’s Chorus in Livermore. In 1992, Bee started the organization with a small music literacy class for 11 children. She was inspired by composer Zoltan Kodaly’s philosophy that the singing voice should be every child’s first and lifelong musical instrument. The name Cantabella Children’s Chorus was derived from the

Italian ‘canta bella’, which translates to ‘sing beautifully’, and this was Bee’s founding vision for the chorus. From these beginnings, Bee grew and nurtured Cantabella Children’s Chorus into an international award-winning organization with a total membership of over 250 singers ranging from kindergarteners to high school students. The mission of the Chorus is to develop healthy vocal techniques and choral artistry within children and youth

through excellence in music education, fine choral production and collaborative cultural arts experiences to enrich and reflect the diverse community. Cantabella strives to enrich the cultural lives of the choristers, as well as those of the residents in the Tri-Valley area and Alameda County. Cantabella believes that the enjoyment of musical performances transcends social and economic differences. While Bee's official retirement as artistic director took place in 2015, she continues to encourage, nurture, and support the organization.



Supervisorial District Two

Suzanne Gayle of Hayward, representing Supervisorial District Two. Suzanne Gayle is an artist and community volunteer who dedicates her life to improving the community through public art and service. Suzanne is an established artist and has created over 100 public artworks including murals, paintings, and sculpture located at municipal sites, schools and libraries throughout the Alameda County and the greater Bay Area. Local public commissions include projects in Castro Valley, Dublin, Hayward, Fremont, and San Leandro. Suzanne is a former appointed member of the Alameda County Arts Commission and a committed community volunteer. Suzanne donates her time and expertise to many educational and community enrichment activities. She sponsors a yearly art internship with a local high school senior and mentors students at local schools. Every year, Suzanne leads the creation of a new family mural project for the Hayward Unified School District Family Resource Center and supports the City of Hayward's Annual Volunteer Awards Dinner. As part of the annual Science in the Park event, Suzanne presents art projects incorporating recycled materials. As a member of the Keep Hayward Clean and Green Commission, she has created artworks for a series of utility boxes and in 2018, she was recognized by the Commission as "Volunteer of the Year." Suzanne inspires the community with her creativity, work with youth, and service to the public.



Supervisorial District Three

Kendra Barnes and Laura Elaine Ellis of San Leandro, representing Supervisorial District Three. Kendra Barnes and Laura Elaine Ellis are the co-founders and co-directors of the Black Choreographers Festival which is a yearly event celebrating African and African American dance and culture with dynamic annual performances culminating at Laney College in Oakland. Kendra and Laura are also dance educators and lead their own non-profit arts organizations that support and promote dance and performance. Kendra is the director of the Kendra Kimbrough Dance Ensemble and K*STAR* Productions. Laura is the director of the African and African American Performing Arts Coalition. Kendra and Laura joined forces to present the comprehensive Black Choreographers Festival: Here and Now which serves the community through providing a forum to increase the visibility of African American

dance. In understanding the impact and importance of the African and African American experience in dance, this project aims to recognize the ingenuity and uniqueness of African and African American Choreographers. The project contributes to the Alameda County and the Bay Area arts community by presenting local and national artists in a series comprised of contemporary and traditional concerts, showcases, mentoring, educational programs, community partnerships, symposia, and archival documentation. The Black Choreographers Festival also fosters a new generation of supporters ensuring the longevity of both established and emerging artists.



Supervisorial District Four

James Gayles of Oakland, representing Supervisorial District Four. James Gayles is known for his distinctive watercolor portraits. James attended Pratt Institute in New York. While on staff at NBC Television, he won an Emmy for his graphic illustrations. James moved to Oakland in the mid 1980s. While working as a newspaper illustrator for over 20 years, his artworks were featured in all of the major Bay Area newspapers. His

artwork has also been published in the New York Times, Essence Magazine, Preview Magazine, Black Enterprise Magazine, Random House and many others. James' artwork has been represented by galleries throughout the US. In 2003, he was honored at the Annual Art of Living Black Exhibition and received the Jan Hart-Shuyers Award for Artistic Excellence. In 2014, James launched his first book "Reflections" which is a collaboration between James, Pochino Press, and more than 20 national and international writers. A number of James' water color portraits featuring community members are in the Alameda County Art Collection and can be seen at the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center, the Alameda County Social Services Agency office in Oakland, and REACH Ashland Youth Center. James has also completed public art commissions for the City of Oakland Craft and Cultural Arts Department and the City of Richmond. James is a master artist who has inspired thousands of community members through his art and his vision of peace, harmony, and cultural preservation.



Supervisorial District Five

Rob Jackson of Oakland, representing Supervisorial District 5: Rob Jackson is a founder and the executive director of Beats, Rhymes and Life in Oakland. Rob is a passionate community leader, educator, and multi-faceted artist. Rob is dedicated to creating a community-based organization that identifies strategies to address socioeconomic injustices and mental health disparities. Beats, Rhymes and Life

pioneered one of the first hip hop therapy programs as an innovative and pragmatic approach to transform and uplift the lives of at-risk youth. With over twenty years of experience working in the social services field and coming from a family of therapists, Rob combines his abilities with extensive clinical insights to facilitate transformation on an individual, community, and systemic level. As a talented hip hop artist, he brings a unique

perspective in integrating the worlds of mental health and urban culture to effectively serve marginalized youth throughout the Bay Area. Rob is an Oakland native and actively involved in the multicultural community. Through hip hop, he has given voice to the most vulnerable youth who face mental health issues and have not responded to traditional therapy. Travelling across the state and the country, he has trained more than 1,000 health care professionals to provide music therapy and has shown that the true power of art resides in all of us.

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.

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