

Winners of 3Arts Awards named

Hedy Weiss

Ten Chicago-area artists working in the performing, teaching, and visual arts will receive a total of \$250,000 in 3Arts Awards tonight, Oct. 6, during a celebratory gathering to be held at the Museum of Contemporary Art. And this year's winners have even more reason to smile than usual as these annual unrestricted awards, now in their seventh year — and presented to directly support women artists, artists of color, and artists with disabilities — have been increased from \$15,000 to \$25,000 each.

The amplified annual 3Arts Awards marks the beginning of a long-term increased commitment from 3Arts in support of Chicago's diverse artistic community. To date, the organization has awarded nearly \$1.5 million to Chicago artists.

This year's 3Arts Award recipients include dancer Darrell Jones; choreographer Erica Mott; circus choreographer Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi; playwright Calamity West; instrumentalists Brandi Berry and Carlos Mejía; visual artists Irina Botea and Amanda Williams; and teaching artists Sophia Nahli Allison and Samuel Roberson.

In a prepared statement, 3Arts' executive director Esther Grisham Grimm explained: "Over the past seven years, we've listened to what artists tell us they need and want to help them make their work and build sustainable careers. In response, we have deepened and expanded our programs so that in addition to the cash grant, our awardees are now offered residency fellowships, project support, professional development and promotion. The time has come to raise the bar again— to raise the amount of our award so that Chicago artists can gain that extra bit of freedom to pursue whatever really matters to them."

Here's a closer look at the award winners:

± **DARRELL JONES** (Denise and Gary Gardner Artist): Jones has performed in the United States and abroad with a variety of choreographers and companies such as Bebe Miller, Urban Bush Women, Ronald K. Brown, Min Tanaka, and Ralph Lemon. In addition to performing, Darrell is a choreographer and a tenured faculty member at The Dance Center of Columbia College.

± **ERICA MOTT** (McCormick Family Foundation Artist): A performance/dance artist engaged in the conversation between movement, sound, video, and object, Mott's recent performances were featured at Audio Art Festival (Krakow, Poland), Free Fall Festival (Toronto, Canada), NES (Skagastrond, Iceland), Museo del Ferrocarril and CASA (Oaxaca, Mexico), and CAD Special Exhibitions Space/Artopolis (Chicago). She works with Guillermo Gomez-Pena's collective, La Pocha Nostra, teaches workshops for Lookingglass Theatre Company, Northeastern University, The Second City, and others, and is an instructor in the performance department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is a recipient of several awards including Amnesty International's Patrick Stewart Human Rights Fellowship (to teach performing arts in South Africa).

± **SYLVIA HERNANDEZ-DISTASI** : A second-generation circus performer who grew up touring with various circuses across the country, Hernandez-DiStasi toured for three years with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus and competed in the Circus World Championships in London, England. In 1990, she moved to Chicago where she began teaching and choreographing circus arts, and she teamed up with the Lookingglass Theatre Company, with whom she has created 12 productions. She is a co-founder and co-artistic director of The Actors Gymnasium where she is a circus teacher, act creator, and choreographer for circus productions.

± **CALAMITY WEST** (Merrill Lynch Artist): A Chicago-based playwright, West received her BA in playwriting at Webster University in 2004 and earned her MFA in playwriting at California College of the Arts in San Francisco in 2007. Among her recent full-length plays to receive productions are "Ibsen is Dead" and "The Peacock" (Jackalope

Theatre Company), “The Gacy Play” (Sideshow Theatre Company), and “Common Hatred” (The Ruckus).

± BRANDI BERRY (Gertrude E. Grisham Artist): A violinist praised for her “four-string acrobatics” in the performance of baroque and classical music, Berry also has a long history of performing bluegrass and country with such groups from Texas (her home state) as Kat’s Kradle, the Bozarts, and Newgrass; and has fiddled at the Irish American Heritage Center and the Chicago Barn Dance Company. She teaches fiddle at the Old Town School of Folk Music, and is a member of the avant-world rock group, Kmang-Kmang. With degrees in violin performance from Indiana University and the University of North Texas, Berry serves on the faculty of DePaul University as co-director of their Baroque Ensemble program, and has guest coached ensembles at Northwestern University and Wheaton College.

± CARLOS MEJÍA: A master musician, mentor of young musicians and cultural activist specializing in Mayan culture, the Guatemalan marimba, and other instruments, Mejia was born in the Maya K’iche’ (or Quiché) community of Guatemala. At the age of 12, he joined a professional marimba ensemble at the Hotel Mayan Inn. While in high school, he enrolled in the music conservatory of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala and finished his studies in 1978. That same year, he joined Unión Ideal, one of the most popular marimba orchestras in Guatemala. In the 1980s, as civil war ran rampant in Guatemala, he gained more notoriety as a Mayan musician and the military government increased its scrutiny on him. He became a paramedic during the war, was jailed twice for subversion, and tortured on repeated occasions. Granted political refuge in the United States in 1987, he has slowly tried to rebuild his life, working as a janitor, a handyman, and a day-laborer to make ends meet while devoting all his spare time to playing and teaching the Guatemalan marimba.

± SOPHIA NAHLI ALLISON (Southwest Airlines Artist): This teaching artist, a native of South Central Los Angeles, is a visual journalist at the community level and a media arts educator. Her work focuses on the documentation and authentic representation of black communities. She believes storytelling and community involvement is a tool for social change. In 2014, Sophia completed a nine-month Photojournalism Fellowship with The Chicago Reporter. Her work has been recognized by the Illinois Press Photographers Association and she was a participant of the 2nd Annual New York Times Portfolio Review as well as the Student Multimedia Project fellowship with The National Association of Black Journalists. A graduate of Columbia College Chicago with a B.A. in Photojournalism, Allison has been a teaching artist Fellow at Marwen, Street Level Youth Media, and Step Up Women’s Network, and was selected for the 2013 Teaching Artist Development Studio Cohort with the Center for Community Arts Partnerships.

± SAMUEL ROBERSON (Siragusa Foundation Artist): Upon graduating from Howard University, Roberson accepted an apprenticeship at The Children’s Theatre of Minneapolis where he spent the next three years defining his desires for acting, writing, directing, and social justice theater. For the past 12 years, he has been teaching art across the country and he was recently named the new artistic director of Congo Square Theatre. He has taught with Victory Gardens, Steppenwolf, American Theatre Company, Northlight Theatre, and 16th Street Theatre. His Chicago stage credits include: “Samuel J and K” (Steppenwolf Theatre), “Civil War Christmas” (Northlight Theatre), “The Colored Museum” and “Sanctified” (Congo Square), “Living Green” and “The Lost Boys of Sudan” (Victory Gardens Theatre), and “The Ballad of Emmett Till” (Goodman Theatre). Roberson also founded an Education and Outreach initiative with Congo Square called Y- BOOM (Young Brothers Owning Our Mission), a literacy-based leadership program that provides a safe environment for adolescent African American men.

± AMANDA WILLIAMS (Stan Lipkin and Evelyn Appell Lipkin Artist): For the better part of 20 years, Williams has been consumed with how combining art and architecture might help make all parts of Chicago thrive. Raised in Auburn Gresham, she studied architecture at Cornell University and practiced architecture for a number of years in the Oakland Bay Area before turning her full attention to visual art. Color is a central preoccupation in her work; her evolving palette derived largely from the urban landscapes she traversed as a child. Her most recent work focuses on deep explorations of the link between color and space. She has exhibited and lectured throughout the US, including at the Studio Museum in Harlem, Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, and the University of Michigan, and she currently serves as an adjunct professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology where she teaches Design and Color Theory.

± IRINA BOTEVA (Chandler Family Artist): For the past 10 years Irina Boteva has engaged in an art practice that uses

multiple media to inspect socio-political dynamics and the possibility of transformation. Her artistic methodology combines “reenactment strategies, simulated auditions, elements of direct cinema, and cinéma vérité,” and her interest lies in “the reality of the performance and the authentic individuality of the performers.” Botea’s work has been featured in solo and group shows, including the 55th Venice Biennale, as well as at The New Museum, New York; National Gallery Jeu de Paume, Paris; Kunsthalle Winterthur; Reina Sofia National Museum, Madrid and others. She was awarded the Impakt Film Festival Silver Award.

Hedy Weiss has been Theater and Dance Critic of the Chicago Sun-Times since 1984, reporting on local, national and international productions, as well as a wide range of other subjects including art and architecture, books, travel and international affairs.

