

# rachel uffner

## SCENE

ARTS DISTRICT

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### 55th Annual Cleveland Arts Prize Awards Set to Celebrate Dynamic Winners

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The **2015 Winners of the Cleveland Arts Prize** have been announced, and now it's time to celebrate. At 6:15 p.m. this Thursday, June 25, the Cleveland Museum of Art's Gartner Auditorium hosts the Cleveland Arts Prize's 55th Annual Awards Event. The evening features special guest host CMA Director William Griswold, and Master of Ceremonies Dan Moulthrop, the CEO of the City Club of Cleveland. During this special evening, the winners will be honored and performances will take place throughout the program.



This year's winners include: Emerging Artists Gianna Commito and Mary Weems, Mid-Career Artists Felise Bagley and Michaelangelo Lovelace, Lifetime Award Winner H. Leslie Adams, the Robert Bergman Prize Winner William Gould, Special Honoree for 2015 Julian Stanczak and the Martha Joseph Prize Winners Jules and Mike Belkin.

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**The daughter of** professors of math and marine biology, Gianna Commito swore as a child that she would never become a college professor. Today's she's an associate professor of painting at Kent State University. So, what happened?

"In college, I saw that my professors all had thriving careers, actively making and showing their work and teaching," explains Commito. "That was very inspiring to a 19-year-old girl trying to figure out what I wanted to do."

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Commito earned a BFA in Painting and Ceramics in 1998 from the New York State School of Art and Design and received both an MA (2002) and MFA (2003) in Painting from the University of Iowa. Her work has been exhibited locally and nationally at venues such as William Busta Gallery, MOCA Cleveland, Shaheen Modern and Contemporary, The Drawing Center and The National Academy Museum. She is represented by Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York, where she had an exhibition in January. She credits her home of Kent and Northeast Ohio for part of her success.

"I've been able to do a lot of different, wonderful things here with my life," she says of her professional, creative and personal life in Northeast Ohio. "So you have to give credit to where you live and who surrounds you."

**Mary Weems was** the first African American Poet Laureate of Cleveland Heights (2007 to 2009). She earned both a BA and MA in English from Cleveland State University, before receiving a PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. After returning to Cleveland, she taught at Cleveland State, John Carroll University and Ohio University in Athens. Weems has authored and co-edited more than a dozen books. Most recently, her play *Purses* was performed at Karamu House and received overwhelmingly positive reviews.

"I want people to be creative, critical thinkers with the kind of social consciousness that moves them to make a positive difference in this world that pertains to social issues," says Weems. "As someone who lived through the '60s, to see where we are not when it comes to race and gender is disappointing."

She is currently working on her next book, *Don't Be Afraid to Fly*, inspired by her six years with Upward Bound summer students at the Ohio State University. Additionally, she's writing a new play, *Gunfight*, responding to random gun violence. If that wasn't enough, she's currently on a national tour performing her one-woman show, *Black Notes*, in support of her latest book, *Blackeyed: Plays and Monologues*.

**Felise Bagley has** been performing, collaborating and creating with GroundWorks Dance Theatre for nearly 15 years. She has appeared in films and shows including *Fun Size* (Paramount Pictures, 2011) and *Club MTV*, as well as publications such as *Dance Magazine*, *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. During her three-decade career, the native New Yorker has worked with choreographers and dance artists such as Gerald Arpino, Talley Beatty, Lynne Taylor-Corbett, Beth Corning, Gina Gibney, Judith Jameson, Dianne McIntyre, Heinz Poll and David Shimotakahara. She began her dance training with Willa Damien of the Bejart Ballet of the 20th Century.

**Michelangelo Lovelace** was born Michael Anthony Lovelace. Growing up in Cleveland, his friends nicknamed him Michelangelo for his evident interest in art. He dropped out of high school at 16, but when he received sole custody of his children, Lovelace enrolled at Tri-C Metro and earned his GED at age 22. Upon enrolling at the Cleveland Institute of Art in 1985, Lovelace legally changed his name to Michelangelo and declared his intention to pursue a career in art. However, trying to afford art supplies and tuition while raising kids on food stamps and welfare became too much.

Through all his struggles – three divorces, two bankruptcies, an unsuccessful move to Los Angeles and the deaths of a young son, his best friend and his mother – he continued to paint. Years later, his hard work has paid off. His work resides in the permanent collections of Progressive insurance, the Cleveland Clinic and Artists Archives of the Western Reserve. His paintings have been exhibited in New York, Baltimore, Chicago and throughout Ohio. Currently, he is part of *How to Remain Human* at MOCA Cleveland.

Last year, he received a Creative Workforce Fellowship from the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (CPAC). By day, he's a nurse's aide in Skill Rehabilitation at MetroHealth Medical Center, and he paints at home in his basement studio. He estimates he has produced more than 500 paintings and still has many more he wants to create. He draws inspiration from personal and social issues in his community.

"I have so many more things that I need to say," says Lovelace. "And painting feeds the need in me to feel alive and important and to see my ideas come to life."

**H. Leslie Adams** has worked in a variety of media during his career, including symphony, ballet, chamber, choral, instrumental and vocal solo and keyboard. Adams has earned degrees from Oberlin College, California State University Long Beach and the Ohio State University.

After teaching at the University of Kansas during the majority of the seventies, Adams returned to Cleveland in 1979 and recommitted himself to composing. By 1986, he had completed his first opera, *Blake*. "My opera turned out to be about slavery," he explains. "But I didn't want to write about slavery, so I made it about the universal desire for freedom, which is everyone's story."

Adams' works have been performed by the Prague Radio Symphony, Iceland Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic and Indianapolis Symphony, and commissioned by The Cleveland Orchestra, Ohio Chamber Orchestra, and Cleveland Chamber Symphony, among others.

**During his 50-year career**, William Gould has made a significant impact on Cleveland's urban landscape, including the preservation of historically significant industrial buildings. As a founder of ArtSpace Cleveland, Gould spent the first decade of this millennium working with Cleveland City Council to enact the Live/Work Overlay District Zoning that allows artists to live and work in vacant and underused factories and warehouses. This rezoning is largely responsible for the current revitalization of the St. Clair-Superior neighborhood, which continues to attract artists from near and far. Gould earned a BA in Architecture at the University of Michigan and his Master's Degree in Urban Studies/Affairs at Cranbrook Academy of Art.

**Julian Stanczak is** considered one of the pioneers of the Op Art movement. He originally received the Cleveland Arts Prize in 1969, but will be honored with a special video presentation at this year's event.

Born in Poland in 1928, Stanczak was forced into a Siberian labor camp at the beginning of World War II. There, he permanently lost the use of his right (dominant) arm. He learned to write and paint left-handed in a Polish refugee camp in Uganda after escaping Siberia in 1942, at 13. He moved to the U.S. in 1950 and eventually settled in Cleveland. Stanczak taught at the Art Academy of Cincinnati from 1957 to 1964 before serving as Professor of Painting at Cleveland Institute of Art from 1964 to 1995.

In 1998, Stanczak's 50-year career was honored with a collaborative retrospective between Youngstown's Butler Institute of American Art, the Columbus Museum of Art and the Josef Albers Museum in Germany.

**For more than** 50 years, brothers Mike and Jules Belkin have been catalysts for Cleveland's role in the music and entertainment industry. Many experts credit their successful endeavors as the foundation that brought the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum to Cleveland.

"Mike and I had a great partnership that worked," explains Jules Belkin. "So our support of the Rock Hall project was a way of giving back to the business and the city that were so good to us."

The Belkin empire had humble beginnings. The business was initially run out of the back of their family's clothing store on the corner of West 25th Street and Clark Avenue. After nearly 40 years and approximately 12,000 concerts throughout the U.S., Jules Belkin decided to retire in 2004. Several years prior, the brothers sold their business to what would become Live Nation. Mike Belkin still works for Live Nation Cleveland as vice president of festivals, and his son, Michael, handles the majority of concert work as senior vice president.

“Mike is one of my dearest friends in the entire world,” says Cleveland’s own Michael Stanley, who has known the Belkins for more than 50 years and been professionally represented by Mike Belkin for 45 years. “Fans of the Michael Stanley Band should know that it if weren’t for Mike Belkin, there wouldn’t have been a band to be a fan of.”

Both Belkin brothers are and have been actively involved in an impressive number of arts and cultural organizations in Northeast Ohio as well as nationally. “Jules and I are both very philanthropic, and we enjoy supporting the community and the arts,” explains Mike Belkin. “There is not a place in the world I would rather be than Cleveland.”

Despite their dramatically different backgrounds and accomplishments, each of this year’s winners has made a lasting, positive impact on Northeast Ohio.

The VIP Party Starts at 5:15 p.m., and an After Party will follow from 8 to 9 p.m. Tickets range from \$75 to \$250, and a portion of each ticket is tax deductible. More information on tickets is available [here](#).

