



ANNUAL AWARDS



Honoring Jamal Cyrus, César Martínez, Surpik Angelini, and Joe Diaz

for Their Lasting Impact on Texas Art and Culture

(Houston, TX – April 23, 2026) Since 1983, Art League Houston (ALH) has been a leader in celebrating contemporary art in Texas through its annual awards program. In 2026, ALH is proud to honor four exceptional individuals whose impact has shaped both the cultural and philanthropic landscape of the state: **Jamal Cyrus** as the 2026 Texas Artist of the Year, **César Martínez** as the 2026 Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts, **Surpik Angelini** as the 2026 Lifetime Achievement in Arts Leadership, and **Joe Diaz** as the 2026 Texas Patron of the Year.

“This year’s honorees each carry a distinct and deeply rooted contribution to the cultural fabric of Texas,” says Jennie Ash, Executive Director of Art League Houston. *“Jamal Cyrus has an extraordinary ability to transform everyday materials into powerful reflections on Black history and resistance, expanding how we understand the American narrative. César Martínez’s portraits have shaped the visual language of Mexican American identity for generations, capturing both individuality and collective memory with striking clarity. Surpik*

Angelini has spent decades building spaces for artists and thinkers to engage in meaningful, interdisciplinary dialogue, quietly but profoundly influencing the way ideas move through our community. Joe Diaz has dedicated his life to supporting artists not just through collecting, but through long-term relationships, care, and stewardship. Each of them has changed the landscape in a distinct way, and it is an honor to recognize the depth of their impact.”

Jamal Cyrus is a Houston-based artist whose multidisciplinary practice explores the intersections of Black American history, music, and cultural production. Working across sculpture, collage, assemblage, and performance, Cyrus creates layered works that draw from archival materials and sonic traditions to examine how history is shaped, remembered, and reimagined. He was a member of Otabenga Jones & Associates, an influential artist collective active from 2002 to 2017. While his practice has evolved across a range of influences and contexts, Houston’s historic Third Ward served as an important personal touchstone and early foundation for his artistic development, reflecting the neighborhood’s role as a vital intersection of creativity, pedagogy, and community life. He has presented solo exhibitions at institutions including the Blaffer Art Museum, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and his work has been featured in major exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Menil Collection, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. A recipient of numerous honors, including a 2023 Guggenheim Fellowship and the 2020 David C. Driskell Prize, Cyrus’s work is featured in significant public collections across the United States.

César Martínez is a San Antonio-based artist and a pivotal figure in the Chicano Art Movement of the 1970s and 1980s. His work offers a sustained exploration of contemporary Chicano culture, drawing from Mexican American visual traditions, photography, and the Western art canon to create striking compositions that place introspective figures against bold, color-saturated backgrounds inspired by Mexican architecture. Developed from memory and archival sources, his figures function as cultural archetypes rather than traditional portraits. His work reflects a nuanced exploration of identity, representation, and cultural history, and is featured in major museum collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, among others. In addition to his artistic practice, he was a

member of the seminal artist collective Con Safo and a founding member of Los Quemados.

Surpik Angelini is a Houston-based artist, independent curator, writer, and cultural researcher whose work bridges art, architecture, and anthropology. Over the past four decades, she has been a leading force in advancing interdisciplinary and socially engaged art practices. As co-founder and director of the Transart Foundation for Art and Anthropology, she has created a vital platform supporting artists and scholars, with a particular focus on advancing, studying, and writing about the artist's creative process. Through this work, she has helped shape Houston's cultural landscape and foster dialogue at the intersection of art, research, and community.

Joe Diaz is a San Antonio-based private art collector and longtime advocate for Latino and Chicano artists. Over the past three decades, he has built one of the most significant collections of contemporary and historic Mexican American art, guided by a deep commitment to preserving and elevating artists whose contributions have often been underrepresented in mainstream art history. Known for his close relationships with artists and his holistic approach to collecting, Diaz views his role as one of stewardship, ensuring that these works are protected, contextualized, and shared with broader audiences.

In recognition of the awards, Art League Houston will present solo exhibitions celebrating **Jamal Cyrus** and **César Martínez** from **September 18 to December 20, 2026**, accompanied by publications developed in collaboration with the artists. All four honorees will be celebrated at **ALH's Annual Gala** on **Friday, October 9, 2026**, at **Thompson Houston**, co-chaired by **Sarah Beth Wilson** and **Daisy Perez**. For more information about sponsorship opportunities or to purchase tickets, please contact **Jennie Ash** at **713.523.9530 ext. 7** or **jennie@artleaguehouston.org**



2026 Texas Artist of the Year

Jamal Cyrus

Jamal Cyrus (born 1973, Houston, TX) has an expansive practice that draws on the creative strategies of collage and assemblage, exploring the evolution of identity within Black political movements and the Black radical tradition. His work transforms everyday materials into objects with rich, layered networks of meaning, reflecting a sustained engagement with history, memory, and cultural production.

The sociopolitical applications of sound and music are central to Cyrus's practice, shaping how he approaches rhythm, repetition, and form across media. Working with materials such as denim, musical instruments, and found objects, he creates works that engage Black sonic traditions while examining the ways cultural histories are erased, recovered, and reimagined.



Since 2019, Cyrus has utilized denim as a primary material, transforming discarded jeans and their cotton thread into painterly abstractions. In the artist's words, he seeks "to use the materials and format of the quilt to document aspects of Black political history." Whether mining FBI files of Black activists and artists or uncovering lesser-known narratives within the Black American

experience, his work acknowledges how adversity and loss can inspire beauty, resistance, and progress, offering an expanded understanding of American history.

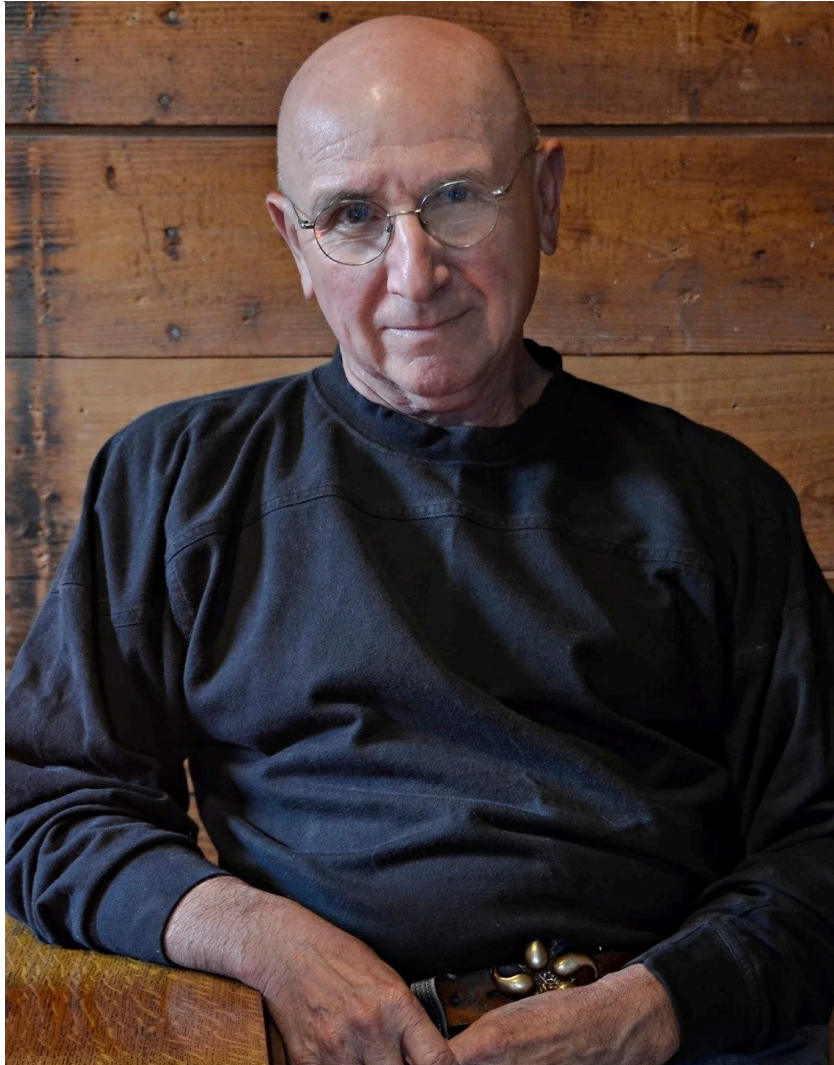
Born and based in Houston, Cyrus is part of a generation of artists who have redefined the relationship between visual art, sound, and archival research. He is an alumnus of the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA). From 2002 to 2017, he was a member of the artist collective Otabenga Jones & Associates, through which he participated in major exhibitions at institutions such as the Menil Collection and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, including the Whitney Biennial.



Cyrus received his BFA from the University of Houston and his MFA from the University of Pennsylvania. He is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship (2023), the David C. Driskell Prize (2020), and

a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant (2019). His mid-career survey, *The End of My Beginning*, opened at the Blaffer Art Museum in 2021 and traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Mississippi Museum of Art. His forthcoming solo exhibition, curated by Ryan N. Dennis, will open at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) in June 2027.

His work has been featured in major national and international exhibitions, including most recently *Alice Coltrane, Monument Eternal* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2025). His work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Walker Art Center, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, among others. Cyrus lives and works in Houston, Texas.



César. Martínez, courtesy of the artist

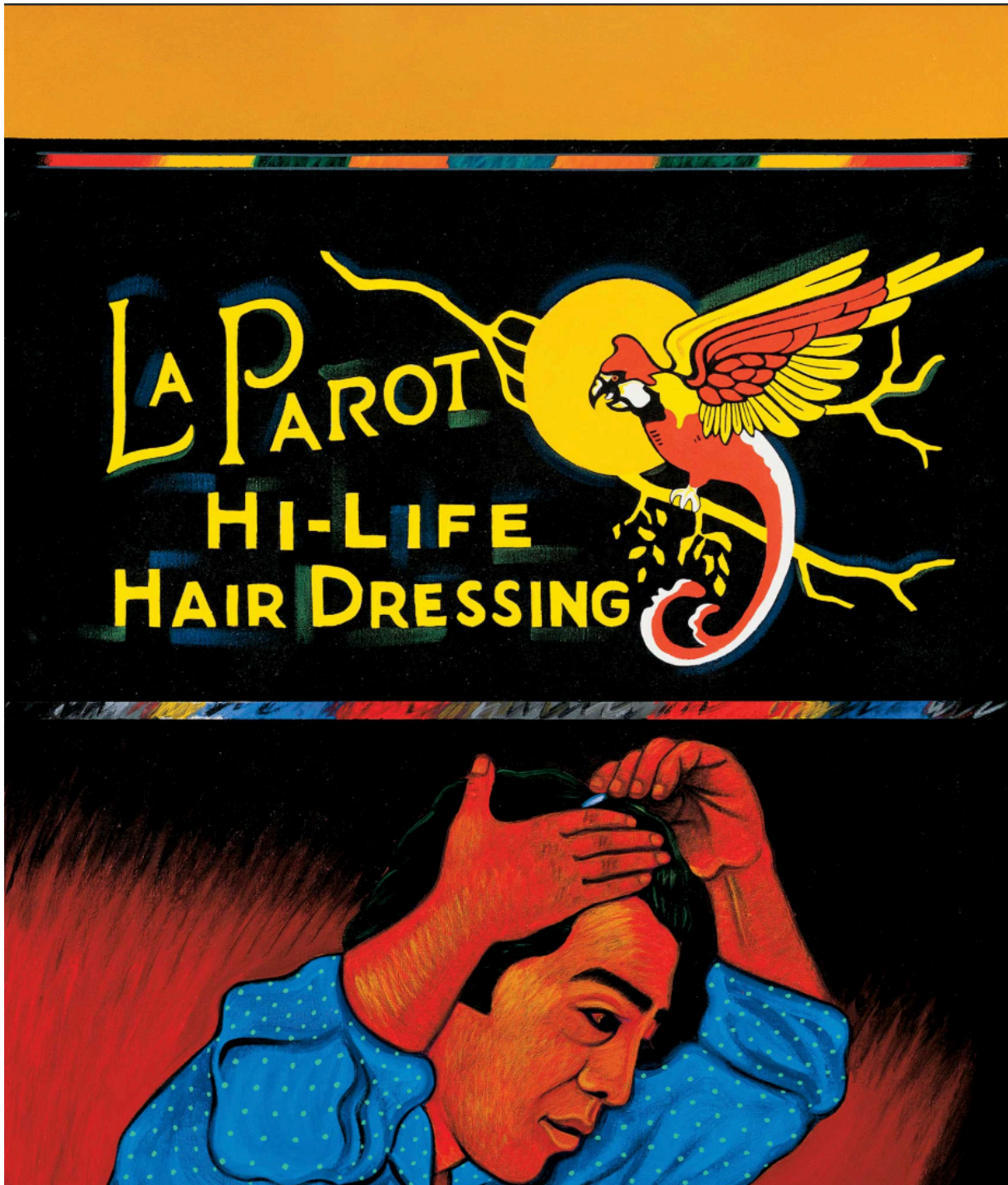
2026 Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts

César Martínez

César Martínez (b. 1944, Laredo, Texas) is a San Antonio-based artist and a pivotal figure in the Chicano Art Movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Over the course of his career, he has developed a distinctive body of work that offers a sustained exploration of contemporary Chicano culture, shaping how identity, representation, and cultural memory are visualized.

Raised in the border region between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, Martínez's early experiences moving between cultures deeply informed his artistic perspective. The visual language of Mexican markets, architecture, and traditions continues to

resonate throughout his work, grounding it in a lived cultural context that feels both personal and collective.



César A. Martínez, *La Parot*, 1978

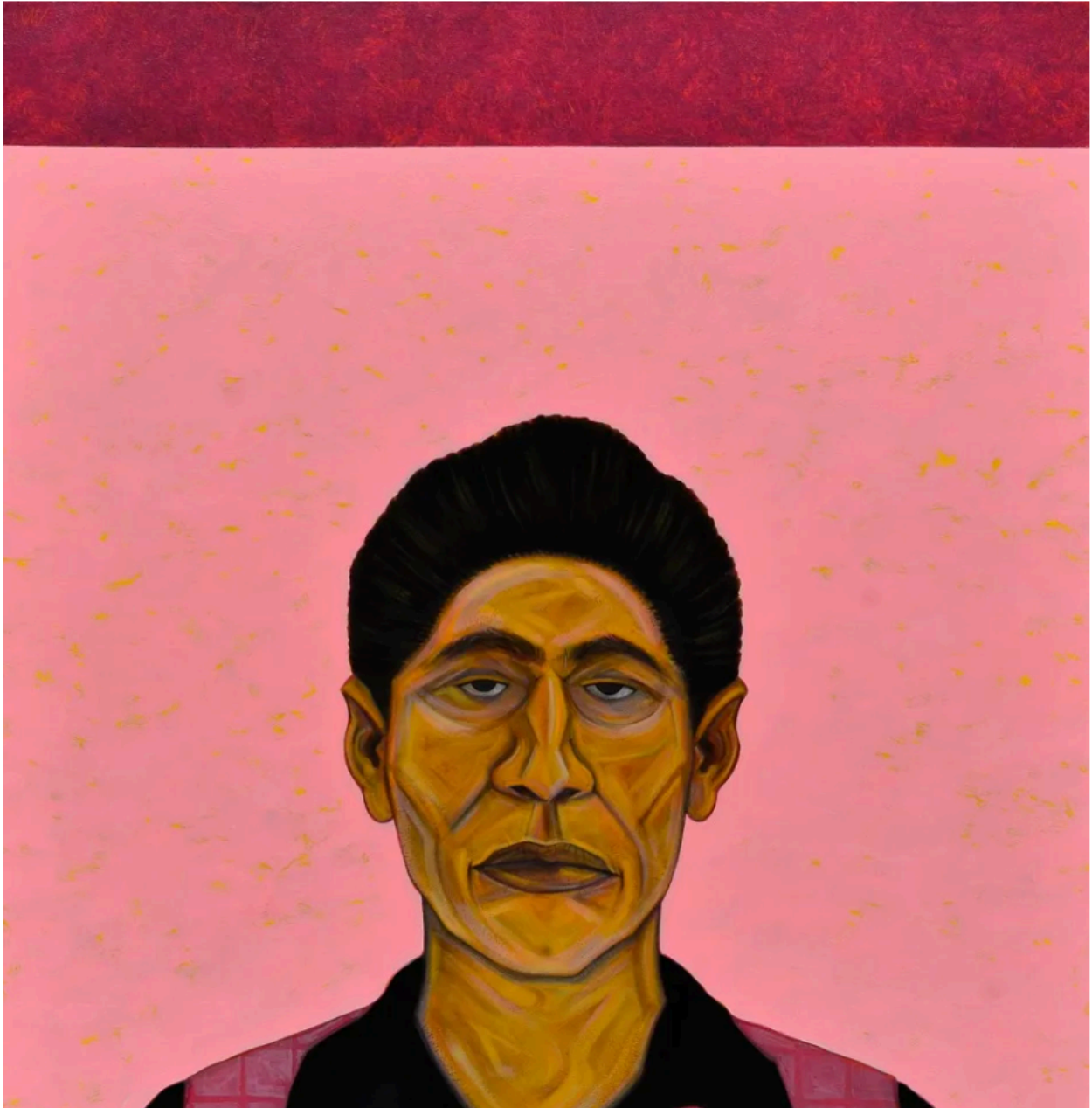
Acrylic on canvas

70 x 50 x 2 in

Collection of Joe Diaz, San Antonio, Texas

Martínez's practice unfolds across four major series: the Bato/Pachuco Series, the South Texas Series, the Mestizo Series, and the Serape Series, each offering a distinct lens on Chicano culture and employing varied artistic approaches. Together, these bodies of work form a layered and evolving investigation into identity, history, and cultural expression.

He first gained recognition through his bato and pachuco figures, developed at a time when Mexican American identity was largely absent from mainstream representation. Rather than depicting specific individuals, these works present semi-fictional Chicano characters constructed from memory and a wide range of visual sources, including yearbooks, obituaries, and archival photographs. These composite figures function not as portraits, but as cultural archetypes that reflect the complexity of a working-class community often overlooked or marginalized.



César A. Martínez, Poncho, 2024

Acrylic on canvas

54 x 44 in

Collection of Rick Liberto. Image courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio/ New York.

Though not conceived as overtly political, Martínez's work became deeply intertwined with the Chicano Movement, contributing to a broader effort to define and visualize Mexican American identity during a period of cultural transformation. In this context, his work stands as both a personal and collective

archive, one that continues to shape how Chicano history is seen and understood.

Martínez's work is included in major museum collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the McNay Art Museum, among others. His work has been widely exhibited and critically recognized, including a major retrospective organized by the McNay Art Museum in 1999.



Surpik Angelini (photo credit: Fabiola Lopez Duran)

2026 Lifetime Achievement Award in Arts Leadership

Surpik Angelini

Surpik Angelini is a Houston-based artist, independent curator, writer, and cultural researcher whose work bridges art, architecture, and anthropology. For over four decades, she has developed an interdisciplinary practice grounded in cultural inquiry, social research, and critical dialogue.

Trained in fine art at Mills College and Cornell University, and in architecture and urban planning at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, Angelini later earned her Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Houston. Her early artistic development was shaped by collaborations with John Cage and Gordon Matta-Clark, as well as her theoretical studies with art historian Thomas McEvilley.

In 1996, Angelini co-founded the Transart Foundation for Art and Anthropology, a Houston-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting artists, scholars, curators, and filmmakers whose work engages contemporary social research and cultural critique. Central to Transart's mission is a sustained focus on supporting, advancing, studying, and writing about the artist's creative process. Through this work, she has cultivated a transdisciplinary platform that advances a postcolonial vision of art, fosters anthropological approaches to creative practice, and supports artists through exhibitions, research initiatives, and direct project-based grants.

In 2018, Angelini established a permanent home for the foundation in Houston's Museum District, creating an intimate, villa-inspired space designed to host exhibitions, convenings, and shared meals that spark dialogue and deepen community engagement. Conceived as a site for reflection and exchange, the space embodies her commitment to creating environments where art and anthropology intersect and where critical conversations can unfold.

Angelini has exhibited her work in solo and group exhibitions and has lectured widely at universities and museums across the United States. Her essays and critical writings have been published in academic journals, art magazines, and exhibition catalogs, where she works to contextualize artists' practices within broader cultural frameworks. Through her artistic, curatorial, and organizational work, Angelini has played a vital role in shaping Houston's cultural landscape, fostering generations of artists and advancing interdisciplinary dialogue at the intersection of art, research, and community.



Joe Diaz

2026 Texas Patron of the Year

Joe Diaz

Joe Diaz is a San Antonio-based private art collector and longtime advocate for Latino and Chicano artists. Over the past three decades, he has built one of the most significant collections of contemporary and historic Mexican American art, guided by a deep commitment to preserving and elevating artists whose contributions have often been underrepresented in mainstream art history.

Diaz approaches collecting as both a personal and cultural responsibility. Known for his close relationships with artists, he often acquires multiple works that trace the evolution of an artist's practice, creating a collection that reflects not only individual achievement but also the broader arc of cultural production. He has described himself as a "keeper" of the work, emphasizing stewardship over ownership and maintaining a long-term commitment to the artists and histories represented in his collection.

At its core, Diaz's collection serves as both a record and a corrective, documenting the richness and diversity of Mexican American artistic expression

while addressing its historical underrepresentation. Through ongoing loans, exhibitions, and direct support of artists, he ensures that these works remain visible and accessible to the public. His approach reflects a belief that collecting is not about possession, but about care, continuity, and cultural responsibility across generations.

His collection has been featured in museum exhibitions across Texas, including at The University of Texas at San Antonio and the Art Museum of South Texas. It has also been exhibited at the San Jose Museum of Art, San Antonio Museum of Art, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, and the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago. Through his sustained advocacy and support, Diaz continues to play a vital role in shaping the visibility, preservation, and legacy of Latino art in the United States.

ART LEAGUE HOUSTON CONTEMPORARY TEXAS ARTIST ARCHIVE

Our Contemporary Texas Archive program is a cornerstone of ALH's commitment to highlighting and preserving often-overlooked aspects of contemporary Texas art history. This program platforms artists who have demonstrated exceptional creativity and achievement, significantly impacting contemporary visual art in Texas. Through exhibitions, documentary video interviews, and publications, we archive the rich and diverse histories of these artists.

Texas Artist of the Year

Established in 1983, Art League Houston (ALH) created the Texas Artist of the Year award to document and celebrate contemporary Texas art history. The award honors artists who have demonstrated exceptional creativity and outstanding achievement, making a significant and lasting impact on the field of contemporary visual art in Texas.

Honorees are recognized for producing a substantial body of work and for standing out as visionary talents and leading figures in the arts community. Each year, a panel of distinguished, anonymous jurors from across the state nominates and selects the recipient. Since its inception, forty-one remarkable artists have received this distinction, including Dario Robleto, Beili Liu, Vincent Valdez, Letitia Huckaby, Vicki Meek, Rick Lowe, Margarita Cabrera, Francesca Fuchs, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Terrell James, Amy Blakemore, Havel Ruck Projects, Rachel Hecker, Aaron Parazette, Mary McCleary, Joseph Havel, Melissa Miller, Al Souza, The Art Guys, Dick Wray, Luis Jiménez, Bert L. Long, Jr., Jesús Moroles, James Surls, and Dr. John Biggers, among others.

Texas Patron of the Year Award

Established in 1989, Art League Houston's Texas Patron of the Year award honors extraordinary individuals who have significantly advanced the work of Texas artists. The award recognizes the essential role of patrons whose support, advocacy, and commitment have helped shape the landscape of contemporary visual art in Texas.

Whether through innovative initiatives, sustained financial support, or deep community involvement, these individuals have made a lasting impact on the cultural fabric of the state. Past recipients include Leah Bennett, Cecily E. Horton, Melanie Lawson & John Guess, Chinhui Juhn & Eddie Allen, Mary & Bernadino Arocha, Anita & Gerald Smith, Jereann Chaney, Lynn Goode, Annise Parker, Stephanie Smither, Leigh & Reggie Smith, Judy & Scott Nyquist, Victoria & Marshal Lightman, Leslie & Brad Bucher, Anne & James Harithas, Gus Kopriva, Clint Willour, and Lester Marks, among others.

Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts

In 2013, Art League Houston established the Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts to honor artists whose careers have spanned more than four decades and who have made outstanding contributions to the visual arts in Texas and beyond.

This award recognizes individuals whose lifelong dedication to their practice has had a profound and lasting impact on the cultural landscape. Past honorees

include Kathy Vargas, Earlie Hudnall, Jr., Celia Álvarez Muñoz, George Smith, Jesse Lott, Forrest Prince, and Kermit Oliver.

Lifetime Achievement Award in Arts Leadership

In 2019, Art League Houston expanded its Lifetime Achievement recognition to include a biennial award honoring visionary arts leaders who have made significant contributions to contemporary visual art in Texas over more than forty years.

This award celebrates individuals who have consistently championed and supported the visual arts, distinguishing themselves through leadership, advocacy, and impact on the cultural landscape. Past honorees include Michelle Barnes, Wendy Watriss, Dr. Alvia Wardlaw, and Betty Moody.

PAST AWARD RECIPIENTS

TEXAS ARTIST OF THE YEAR

Dario Robleto, 2025

Beili Liu, 2024

Vincent Valdez, 2023

Letitia Huckaby, 2022

Vicki Meek, 2021

Rick Lowe, 2020

Margarita Cabrera, 2019

Francesca Fuchs, 2018

Trenton Doyle Hancock, 2017

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT IN THE VISUAL ARTS

Kathy Vargas, 2024

Earlie Hudnall, Jr, 2022

Celia Álvarez Muñoz, 2020

George Smith, 2018

Jesse Lott, 2016

Forrest Prince, 2015

Kermit Oliver, 2013

Terrell James, 2016

Amy Blakemore, 2015

Havel Ruck Project, 2014

Rachel Hecker, 2013

Aaron Parazette, 2012

Mary McCleary, 2011

Joseph Havel, 2010

Keith Carter, 2009

Melissa Miller, 2008

Dixie Friend Gay, 2007

Al Souza, 2006

The Art Guys, 2005

Richard Stout, 2004

Virgil Grotfeldt, 2003

Sharon Kopriva, 2001

Dick Wray, 2000

Linda Ridgway, 1999

Luis Jimenez, 1998

Gael Stack, 1997

Lucas Johnson, 1996

Robert Wilson, 1995

Karin Broker, 1994

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT IN ARTS LEADERSHIP

Michelle Swain Barnes, 2024

Wendy Watriss, 2023

Dr. Alvia Wardlaw, 2021

Betty Moody, 2019

TEXAS PATRON OF THE YEAR

Leah Bennett, 2025

Cecily E. Horton, 2023

Melanie Lawson & John Guess, Jr, 2022

Chinhui Juhn & Eddie Allen, 2021

Mary & Bernardino Arocha, 2020

Anita & Gerald Smith, 2019

Jereann Chaney, 2018

Lynn Goode, 2017

Poppi Georges Massey, 2016

Mayor Annise Parker (2010-16), 2015

Stephanie Smither, 2014

Leigh & Reggie Smith, 2013

Judy & Scott Nyquist, 2012

Victoria & Marshall Lightman, 2011

George Krause, 1993

James Surls, 1991

Bert L. Long, Jr., 1990

Jesús Moroles, 1989

Dr. John Biggers, 1988

Charles Pebworth, 1987

Charles Schorre, 1986

Charles Umlauf, 1985

Dorothy Hood, 1984

E.M. (Buck) Schiwetz, 1983

Leslie & Brad Bucher, Patrons 2010

Karol Kreymer & Robert Card, M.D.,
2009

Ann & James Harithas, 2008

Gus Kopriva, 2007

Clint Willour, 2006

Lester Marks, 2002

Sue Rowan Pittman, 1989