

2014 John Babcock John Babcock’s work has been shown in over 30 major museums in Europe, the United States and Japan, and is held in many public and private collections, including the Museum of Art and Design, NY.

2013 Susana Arias Susana has shown her work nationally and internationally, with work in museums in Latin America as well as the United States. Awards include a 1987 NEA grant. She Volunteers at local elementary schools and has organized events where local artists share their expertise with the public.

2012 Gary Young Since 1975, Gary has designed, illustrated, and printed limited edition artist’s books and broadsides. His print work is represented in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Awards include the Pushcart Prize and the prestigious Shelley Memorial Award of the Poetry Society of America.

2011 Phil Collins Collins co-founded New Music Works in 1979, serving as the organization’s Artistic Director and Conductor since 1982. His works have been played throughout the U.S.and abroad. Awards include: First Prize, 1994 L’ARCIM Festival; The Gail Rich Award; and a Dramalogue Award.

2010 Robert Kelley Robert Kelley was Artistic Director for the Santa Cruz Ballet Theatre from 1998-2019. Two of his works were given the Regional Dance America Choreography Award. He has served on the Tannery Arts Center Board and in 2009, received a Gail Rich Award.

2008 Manuel Santana Manuel Santana studied art at Otis Art Institute. After decades in the restaurant business, he began actively painting and sculpting again, becoming an accomplished artist. His numerous awards include a Gail Rich Award.

2007 Richard Deutsch Richard’s sculptures are in the permanent collection of the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum and the Smithsonian Institution. He was a founding and active member of Santa Cruz Art Center and was instrumental in bringing Open Studios to Santa Cruz County.

2006 Laurie R. King Laurie R. King, a New York Times best-selling mystery writer, has won the Edgar and Creasey awards, the Nero, and the MacCavity. Her nominations include the Agatha, the Orange, the Barry, and two more Edgars.

2005 “Sista” Monica Parker Sista Monica wrote, produced, performed and toured in support of her original music. She received the coveted BAMMIE Award for “Best Blues Artist” in California in 1998, and the Artist of the Year Award at the Monterey Bay Blues Festival in 2002.

2003 - Karen Thuesen Massaro - Visual Artist

2002 - Jessica Williams - Musician

2001 - Carol Summers - Visual Artist

1999 - Morton Marcus - Poet

1998 - Lynda Watson - Visual Artist

1997 - Paul Whitworth - Actor

1996 - Frans Lanting - Photographer

1995 - Adrienne Rich - Poet

1994 - Linda Burman-Hall - Musician

1993 - Jack Zajac - Visual Artist

1992 - Douglas McClellan - Visual Artist

1991 - William Everson - Poet

1990 - Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County

1989 - Charles N. Hilger - Visual Artist

1988 - George Barati - Composer and Conductor

1987 - Cabrillo Music Festival

1986 - James D. Houston - Author

1985 - Lou Harrison - Composer

1984 - Tandy Beal - Dancer, Director and Choreographer

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors	
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Santa Cruz County Arts Commission	
Sonia Leclerc, Karen Kroslowitz	District 1
Brenda Rogers, Charlie Singer	District 2
Valeria Miranda, Sean McGowen	District 3
Judy Stabile, Vacancy	District 4
Margaret Niven (chair), Lynda Phillips	District 5

Over the last 41 years, the Santa Cruz County Arts Commission has selected outstanding artists nominated by the public, and has honored them through the Artist of the Year Award. The *Artist of the Year* award is presented for outstanding achievement in the discipline of performing, visual, and literary arts. For more information, please visit www.scparks.com.

Artist of the Year 2025

“An Award to Recognize a Lifetime of Achievement”



Janet Johns

As an Assyrian woman, mother, educator, dance instructor, choreographer and a performing artist in Santa Cruz County for over 45 years, Janet Johns has experienced firsthand the power of the arts for healing a community and bringing people together. She started studying folklorico dance at age 18, learning about the importance of authentic steps, style and choreography from master instructors and keepers of the traditions of Mexico. When she moved to Watsonville to begin her career as a bilingual educator in 1978, she co-founded Esperanza del Valle (EDV) and wrote her first Arts Council grant, establishing her folklorico dance class as a performing company in 1980. Hundreds of dancers have trained, learned, and performed with her company over 44+ years.

Janet has received numerous awards and accolades, including a Proclamation from the Mayor and City of Watsonville in 2020 recognizing her 40 years of leadership with Esperanza del Valle; The Watsonville City Council Mayor’s Award in 2014 in recognition of her leadership in the City of Watsonville; a Gail Rich Award in 2002 for her community service in the arts; and a Calabash Award in 2001 for Excellence in the Ethnic Arts.

2024
Tammi Brown



Tammi has performed with some of the world’s most notable music icons including Quincy Jones, Alan Parsons, Bobby McFerrin, Stanley Jordan, and Joan Baez. She was a vocalist in the two-time Grammy-nominated vocal ensemble, The Cultural Heritage Choir, and her performance on the *Lost American JazzBook* won the “Best Jazz with Vocals Album” in the 18th Independent Music Awards. Tammi was founder and director of the Santa Cruz Gospel Choir and performed at innumerable benefits for local organizations throughout the County.

2023
Stephen Kessler



Stephen is one of his generation’s most versatile and prolific writers, author of a dozen volumes of original poetry, 16 books of literary translation, three collections of essays, and a novel. In recent years he is best known locally as a wide-ranging and free-thinking opinion columnist in the Santa Cruz Sentinel. He is known nationally and internationally as a translator of modern Spanish and Latin American poets.

2022
Annie Morhauser



Handcrafting her glassware in Santa Cruz County since 1983, Morhauser has developed Annieglass to become one of the largest and most successful American glass studios. Annieglass is featured in the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Gallery of Modern Art in Scotland, and the Corning Museum of Glass. Over 400 non-profits receive annual cash and in-kind donations from Annieglass, and over 40 scholarships have been awarded to students.

Previous Artists of the Year 2024-1984

2021
Guillermo “Yermo” Aranda



Yermo is a co-founder of “El Centro Cultural de La Raza”, a cultural art center focusing on Latino and Indigenous Art forms where he initiated the first Chicano Park Murals in San Diego, now recognized as a National Historical Landmark. In 1983, he began to practice and teach Aztec dance; he co-founded the Whitehawk Dancers, an organization which provides visual and performing arts workshops for youth that still thrives today.

2019
Ellen Bass



Ellen has published over six books of poetry. Among her literary honors are three Pushcart Prizes, the Pablo Neruda Prize, and the Chatauqua Poetry Prize. Ellen is also a celebrated nonfiction writer and a pioneer in the field of healing from child sexual abuse. Ellen helped found and build two thriving Santa Cruz-based non-profit organizations, Kidpower, Inc. and the Survivors Healing Center.

2018
Cheryl Anderson



Cheryl Anderson built the choral and vocal programs at Cabrillo, including founding the Cabrillo Youth Chorus. She is Past President of the American Choral Directors Association Western Region, as well as an internationally-acclaimed guest conductor. Under her direction, Cabrillo’s choirs have performed in many of the world’s most famous concert halls, cathedrals, and opera houses.

2017
Shelley Phillips



Shelley Phillips has played with many professional folk musicians in America, Ireland, and the UK. Her solo albums with Gourd Music include *The Fairie Round*, *Pavane*, and *The Wood Between The Worlds*. Director of the Community Music School of Santa Cruz, she runs Celtic music camps for children and teens, maintains a private studio, and presents concerts and workshops with visiting musicians of the highest caliber.

2016
Shmuel Thaler



Shmuel’s photographs have been published in every leading newspaper in the United States, including the New York Times and Washington Post, as well as in numerous magazines including *Time* and *Forbes*. He has been honored three times with awards in the prestigious National Press Photographers Association Best of Photojournalism contest, most recently in 2015.

2015
Geoffrey Dunn



Dunn is the author of several books, including two volumes of *Santa Cruz Is in the Heart*, *Chinatown Dreams* and *The Lies of Sarah Palin*; his films include *Dollar a Day*, *10 Cents a Dance*; *Miss...or Myth?*; *Calypso Dreams*; and most recently, *The Glamour Boyz Again*. For over 40 years Dunn has been an actively-engaged member of the artistic community, including as co-founder and former Executive Director of Community Television of Santa Cruz Co., as well as a founder and Board member of the Pacific Rim Film Festival.