



## ALH Announces Top Honors for 2022 Annual Awards



Artist Earlie Hudnall, Jr. (left, photo: Ray Carrington), Artist Letitia Huckaby (center, photo: Rambo)  
Melanie Lawson & John Guess, Jr. (right, photo: Karen Sachar)

**2022 Texas Artist of the Year: Letitia Huckaby**  
**2022 Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts: Earlie Hudnall, Jr.**  
**2022 Texas Patrons of the Year: Melanie Lawson & John Guess, Jr.**

(March 31, 2022) – For over three decades, Art League Houston (ALH) has honored the brightest lights in the arts in Texas. This year, ALH proudly announces the selection of **Letitia Huckaby** as the **2022 Texas Artist of the Year**, **Earlie Hudnall, Jr.** as the recipient of the biennial **2022 Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts**, and **Melanie Lawson and John Guess, Jr.** as the **2022 Texas Patrons of the Year**.

*“ALH has a long history of supporting artists and artistic practices in our state” states Jennie Ash, Art League Houston Director. “For almost 40 years, our annual Arts Awards have recognized the creative visionaries who inspire us, engage us, and create transformational change in our communities. We are excited to have the opportunity to honor extraordinary Texas artists, Letitia Huckaby and Earlie Hudnall, Jr. along with long time art supporters Melanie Lawson and John Guess, Jr. This year’s honorees are aligned in their commitment to community and exemplify the impact that artists, arts, and cultural organizations, and those that support them are making to the future of Texas.”*

*“There’s a certain kind of pleasure that comes from being the first African American woman artist to be awarded the Texas Artist of the Year and one of the judges to select the second,” says Vicki Meek, Texas Artist of the Year in 2021 and part of the selection*

1953 Montrose Blvd.  
Houston, Texas 77006  
[artleaguehouston.org](http://artleaguehouston.org)





committee in 2022. *“Letitia Huckaby is a perfect fit for the title 2022 Texas Artist of the Year because she understands that art has the power to evoke change in communities and she’s committed to being that change agent in hers. She does this all while maintaining an active studio practice, exhibiting her art nationwide, and being an engaged mom.”* Vicki Meek highlights the selection of Earlie Hudnall by saying that within the discipline of photography in Houston, *“Earlie Hudnall is at the top of the list, having maintained a career for decades documenting Black Houston along with other topics related to the city. His rich compositions are never simple, as his eye for capturing interesting textures, movements, and human interactions is highly sophisticated. There is no better recipient for the 2022 Texas Lifetime Achievement Award than Earlie Hudnall. He has stayed in the game for more than fifty years, mentoring younger artists along the way, and producing work that stays relevant and fresh.”*

*“It’s been an honor to participate on this year’s jury with such incredible colleagues,”* says Allison Glenn, 2022 Selection Committee Member. *“Both Letitia Huckaby’s and Earlie Hudnall’s practices reflect a deep engagement with their communities, and important contributions to contemporary art.”*

*“What stands out to me about Letitia is her passion for storytelling and her ability to give great dignity and beauty to the voiceless,”* says Rigoberto Luna, 2022 Selection Committee Member. *“I hope this recognition not only shines a brighter light on Letitia but also on the individual’s past and present that inspire her work.”*

Celia Álvarez Muñoz, who received the Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts in 2020 and served as a member of the 2022 Selection Committee expressed her sincere congratulations to Letitia Huckaby and Earlie Hudnall Jr. *“I pass the baton with glee, to what will be a most exciting and rewarding coming year!”* says Muñoz. *“May you shine with all the brilliance that your work has merited these awards! ALH is the most gracious host! Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy!”*

*“Melanie and John have been pillars of the Texas art community for decades,”* says Catherine Ansporn, 2022 Selection Committee Member. *“Especially in Houston, their support for nonprofits, galleries, above all, deep friendships and mentorships of artists have been heartfelt, intelligent, guided by altruism, and profound. They are also museum creators and museum builders. Art League and the selection committee is honored to unanimously select Melanie and John as Art League Houston Texas Patrons of the Year!”*

The ALH Annual Award honorees are selected by a distinguished committee of artists and arts professionals. The selection committee for the 2022 Texas Artist of the Year





and Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts consisted of the following: Vicki Meek (Dallas, TX); Celia Álvarez Muñoz (Arlington, TX); Rigoberto Luna (Co-Founder and Director of Presa House Gallery, San Antonio, TX) and Allison Glenn, (Independent Curator and Writer, Houston, TX and Detroit, MI). The selection committee for the 2022 Texas Patron of the Year consisted of the following: Dr. Alvia J. Wardlaw (Art Historian, Director, and Curator, Texas Southern University Museum); Gaynell Floyd-Drexler (Corporate Attorney and Advocate with Decades of Non-Profit and Community Engagement, Houston TX); Frances Valdez (Executive Director/Houston in Action & Owner/FValdezLaw PC, Houston TX); and Catherine Anson (Executive Editor/Visual Arts + Features at PaperCity Magazine, Houston TX).

ALH will present solo exhibitions celebrating the work of Letitia Huckaby and Earlie Hudnall, Jr. from September 16 to December 3, 2022, and will collaborate with each artist to publish a limited-edition artist catalog. All three awardees will be celebrated at ALH's annual gala, which will be held in their honor on **Friday, October 14, 2022, at POST Houston** in Houston's downtown Theatre District. For more information about sponsorship and tickets, contact **Jennie Ash** at [jennie@artleaguehouston.org](mailto:jennie@artleaguehouston.org) or 713-523-9530.





Artist Letitia Huckaby (photo: Rambo)  
Image courtesy of the Artist

## 2022 Texas Artist of the Year Letitia Huckaby

Letitia Huckaby's career as a photographer did not start with a camera, but with ballet slippers. In 1988 and 1989, she was chosen to participate in the prestigious Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute, and study Modern dance for two weeks under Fulbright scholar and Guggenheim Fellow Pat Catterson of New York City, at Quartz Mountain. Along with dance, the residency offered classes in writing, orchestral and choral music, acting, painting, drawing, and photography. Students came from all over the state to study in all these various disciplines and it was her first exposure to the power of photography as an art form. She was immediately enamored with the process of capturing and printing an image. Unfortunately, her parents were not as impressed with her career prospects in photography, so at the University of Oklahoma, she studied Journalism with an emphasis on Advertising.

After graduating in 1994 with a BA in Journalism, Huckaby went on to secure a position at a radio station in Lawton, OK as the Promotions Coordinator. Although she thoroughly enjoyed that position, her mind kept wandering back to photography. She enrolled in a Vocational College, intending to make photography her hobby, and immediately fell in love with the medium.







Letitia Huckaby, *present parteciple welcoming*, 2022. Pigment Print on Fabric, 48 x 33 ½ inches.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Talley Dunn Gallery

It was around this time that the Oklahoma Arts Institute invited Huckaby back to assist in their Public Relations department, and she found herself wandering around the photography exhibit of instructor Christopher James, an internationally known artist, and photographer. His documentary project in India was a pivotal moment in Huckaby's career. Specifically, James' image *Dying Man*, taken in Benares, India in 1985. This photograph captures an elderly man taking his last breath in a "death hotel." In the image, you can see the smoke from a single candle entering his nostrils and swirling around his head. It looked to Huckaby as if James captured this gentleman's spirit exiting his body. She was so moved by this one photograph that she decided to go back to school and get a degree in photography and had the opportunity to study under James who was the Director of Photography at the Art Institute of Boston (now the art school for Lesley University).

While in Boston, Huckaby found her voice in documentary photography: documenting a dance studio that provided free classes to inner-city kids, a historic jazz club called Wally's that was on the Chitlin' Circuit (performance venues for black performers during the era of segregation), backstage at the Bobbi Brown cosmetics shows, assisting a photographer at a wedding officiated by Bishop Desmond Tutu and just honing her craft by capturing city life with street photography. She received numerous awards and scholarships, started freelancing and selling her work, and held her first exhibition.



Letitia Huckaby, *Outside of Weimar*, 2022. Quilted Pigment Prints on Fabric, 46 x 27 and 43 x 27 inches.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Talley Dunn Gallery

After graduating in 2001 with a BFA in Photography, Huckaby moved back south to be closer to family. She established roots in the Dallas/Fort Worth area where she began freelancing for newspapers and school districts. She shot weddings, sports portraits, and babies. Eventually, she landed a job teaching high school photography, but this came after getting married, the birth of her first child, and the loss of her father. She decided to pursue a master's degree in Photography at the University of North Texas.

During her studies, influenced by the loss of her father who was from Greenwood, Mississippi she began to push beyond the straight image. She felt a need to layer additional information into the work, and she started by looking at cotton. Greenwood is the fourth-largest producer of cotton, and after her father passed, she noticed that her grandmother's neighborhood was surrounded by cotton fields on three sides. Her exploration of materials led her to the practice of printing her images onto cotton fabric: sometimes vintage, sometimes heirloom, and sometimes just plain, white cotton fabric. As a Black person in America, cotton symbolizes the history and a connection to ancestry. It symbolizes struggles, hardships, and accomplishments. It links across history and ties the past to the present and has become the foundation of Huckaby's work. She first began by quilting images together, then making dresses out of family photographs, printing on vintage feed sacks and cotton-picking sacks, framed photographic quilt tops, and finally, progressing to installation artwork.





Letitia Huckaby, *Stephanie & Gloria*, 2020. Pigment print on fabric with embroidery, 70 x 82 x 2 inches  
Image courtesy of the artist and Talley Dunn Gallery

Huckaby's thesis exhibition, *LA 19 (Daughters of God)*, was a mixed media documentary project on her family and heritage. For this body of work, she created environmental portraits of her extended family on her mother's side in the backwoods of Louisiana off Highway 19, just north of Baton Rouge. The images were printed onto fabric, cut into strips, and handsewn into traditionally African American quilting patterns that referenced the quilts of Gee's Bend. Once the photographic quilt tops were complete, they were displayed in antique frames. The exhibition debuted at the South Dallas Cultural Center, TX (2010) and traveled to the Galveston Arts Center, TX (2010); Dallas Contemporary, TX (2010); and was featured in Photo Nola at the McKenna Museum in New Orleans, LA (2010); Next Wall Gallery in conjunction with FotoFest, Houston, TX (2012), and in a one-person show at the Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville, AR (2012).

Since obtaining her MFA in Photography (2010) from the University of North Texas, Huckaby has exhibited both nationally and internationally. She has exhibited as an emerging artist at Phillips, New York City (2019); Harlem School of the Arts, NY (2019); Tyler Museum of Art, TX (2018); Texas Biennial at Blue Star Contemporary, Houston, TX (2013); Camden Palace Hotel Community Arts Centre, Cork City, Ireland (2012); Renaissance Fine Art Gallery curated by Deborah Willis, Ph.D. Harlem, NY (2010); and McKenna Museum, New Orleans, LA (2010). More recently, her work has been featured in exhibitions at Bridge Projects, Los Angeles, CA (2021); 108 Contemporary, Tulsa, OK (2021); McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX (2021); Masur Museum,

1953 Montrose Blvd.  
Houston, Texas 77006  
[artleaguehouston.org](http://artleaguehouston.org)





Letitia Huckaby, *Sadako*, 2020. Pigment print on fabric with embroidery, 70 x 40 x 2 inches  
Image courtesy of the artist and Talley Dunn Gallery

Monroe, LA (2021); Hillard Museum, Lafayette, LA (2021); LSU Museum of Art, Baton Rouge, LA (2021); and at Foto Relevance in conjunction with FotoFest, Houston, TX (2020). Huckaby's work is in the permanent collections of several prestigious museums, including the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington DC; Houston Civic Art Collection, Art at Houston Airport Systems, Houston, TX; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Hillard Art Museum, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, LA; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, TX; Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia, PA; and the Samella Lewis Contemporary Art Collection at Scripps College in Claremont, CA.

Additionally, Huckaby was a featured artist in *MAP2020: The Further We Roll, The More We Gain* at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art (2020), and *State of the Art 2020* at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, AR (2020). She has participated in numerous national and international residencies including ArtPace in San Antonio, TX Curated by Lauren Cross, Ph.D. (Fall 2020); Tallgrass Artist Residency in Matfield Green, KS (2019); In Situ Artist Residency in Tuscany, Italy (2018) Brandywine Workshop residency in Philadelphia, PA (2010); and Gee's Bend – Artist







Residency Under the tutelage of Lucy Mingo, a Gee's Bend quilter in Boykin, AL (2007). Most notably, her exhibition *Lagniappe: Works by Letitia Huckaby* was listed #2 in Glasstire's top five shows in Texas by critics Christina Rees and Brandon Zech (2019) and #3 for a group exhibition entitled *Limitless! Five Women Reshape Contemporary Art* with Martine Gutierrez, Yayoi Kusama, Sandy Skoglund, Jennifer Steinkamp at the McNay Museum of Art in San Antonio, TX (2020). She is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the Hopper Prize (2018), Critical Mass Finalist (2014 & 2013), Directors Choice Award Center for Fine Art Photography selected by Hamidah Glasgow, Executive Director, and Curator at the Center for Fine Art Photography in Denver, CO (2013), Juror's Choice Award in the *American Dream* Exhibition by Deborah Willis, Ph.D. at New Orleans Photo Alliance, LA (2010), and was one of 76 artworks to be acquired by the City of Houston (out of 670 submissions) for the Houston Airport's Civic Art Collection to be on view at George Bush Intercontinental (IAH) and William P. Hobby Airports (HOU). (2021).

Huckaby's work has been featured in several prestigious newspapers, magazines, novels, catalogues, and broadcast stations. Including *Promise and Peril* by Darryl Ratcliff, Dallas Morning News (2020), *Human Stories* by Rebecca Sherman, PaperCity Magazine (2020), *Voices Raised* by Aja Martin, Patron Magazine (2020), *Double Exposure* Modern Luxury Houston Magazine (2020), *Full of Love: Letitia Huckaby in Conversation*, by Taylor Janay Manigoult, Burnaway (2021), *Letitia Huckaby in Conversation with Jonathan Square* for the Textile Association of America (2021), and a feature on *Art Rocks* a national syndication of Louisiana Public Broadcasting by Senior Producer Dorothy Kendrick (2020). Selected novels and catalogues include *Collecting Black Studies: The Art of Material Culture*, edited by Lise Ragbir and Cherise Smith (2020), *Tales Of Courage In The Heartland: Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*, Volume XII (2020), *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack* by Harvard Professor Tiya Miles (2021), *Athenaeum Review* edited by Dr. Benjamin Lima, the University of Texas at Dallas, Issue 5, Winter (2021), and *Otherwise/Revival* by Cara Megan Lewis and Jasmine McNeal (2021), a catalogue which featured thirty artists, including Trenton Doyle Hancock, Clementine Hunter, Lezley Saar, Genesis Tramaine and Kehinde Wiley.

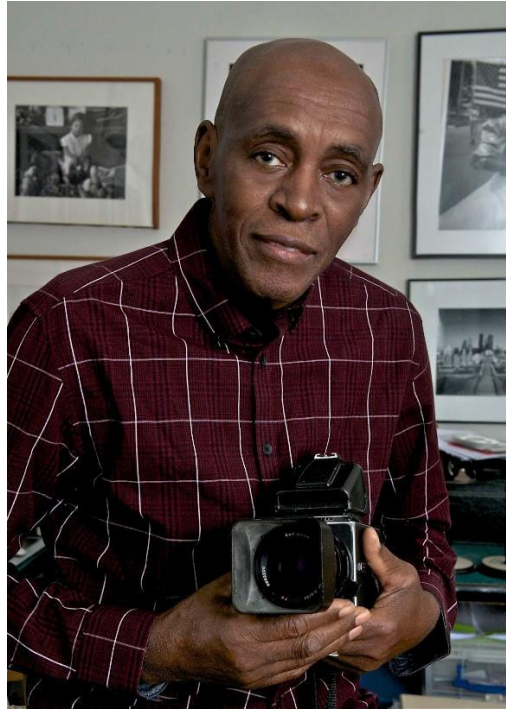
Working from the perspective of a documentary photographer but outputting the images as unique fabric pieces, Huckaby's subject matter has remained focused on history, culture, and storytelling. One project, in particular, *A Tale of Two Greenwoods*, documents two residential blocks in two different cities. One block is in Tulsa, Oklahoma on Haskell Place in a neighborhood adjoining historic Greenwood. Greenwood was one of the most prosperous African American communities in the early 20th century, which was desecrated by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. The other residential block is located on St. Charles Street in the town of Greenwood,



Mississippi—the namesake of the district in Tulsa and the birthplace of her father. The images are printed onto cotton fabric and framed in embroidery hoops hinged together, like the bifold frames people displayed of loved ones in their homes. The work speaks to the desire for people to build a home of their own, the struggles that hinder the “American Dream” for far too many of its citizens, and a present nostalgia (living in a state that is linked heavily to the past). This body of work was most recently displayed in Tulsa during the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre at 108 Contemporary. It will be traveling to St. Edward’s University, Austin, TX in the fall of 2022 and will be featured in a 2023 exhibition, *Emancipation* at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, TX.

Huckaby is a co-founder of *Kinfolk House*, a new creative project space in the predominantly Black and Latina/e/o neighborhood of Polytechnic in Fort Worth, TX. Founded with her husband, Sedrick Huckaby, *Kinfolk House* inhabits a 100-year-old historic home owned by Sedrick’s grandmother, Hallie Beatrice Carpenter. The inaugural exhibition opened on March 5, 2022, and features work by both Letitia and Sedrick. Huckaby lives and works in Fort Worth, TX with her husband Sedrick Huckaby and is the mother of three children, Rising Sun, Halle Lujah, and Rhema Rain. She is represented by Talley Dunn Gallery in Dallas, TX.





Artist Earlie Hudnall, Jr. (photo: Ray Carrington)  
Image courtesy of the Artist

## 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr. was born and raised in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He started taking photos of his own at an early age with a box camera and credits his grandmother and her photo album containing family photographs, obituaries, and community articles, for his early fascination with storytelling and photography. When his parents were busy, Hudnall would go next door to his grandmother Bonnie Jean's home where she would tell him stories about his family and many others in his community including the story of the first African American Navy aviator Jesse L. Brown, also from Hudnall's hometown. *"She told my siblings and I, 'Go on and get Gran's album,'" said Hudnall. "When we opened it, there was a newspaper clipping of his [Jesse L. Brown] picture and about what unfortunately happened to him in the Korean War [Brown died a hero at 24 on December 4, 1950]."*

Hudnall's father was an amateur photographer who took pictures during his time in the military, and with the family. *"Whether it was on Easter Sundays or when we all had on new school clothes, he would line us up and flick the camera,"* said Hudnall. From then on, the artist began to





Earlie Hudnall, Jr.  
*Mother and Sons, Third Ward, Houston, Texas, 1973*  
Gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of the Artist and PDNB Gallery

understand, at an early age, the importance of documenting his community and the significance of who one is and how one lives. *“It was important to shed light on what causes a person to move, strive and become so inventive in his or her own way of survival,”* states Hudnall.

Hudnall began to take his photography practice more seriously during his tour of duty as a U.S. Marine in Vietnam from 1966-67. After returning home in 1968, he enrolled as a student at Texas Southern University (TSU), Houston’s historic Black University. While studying, he and fellow photographer, Ray Carrington III were recruited by Dr. Thomas Freedman, the notable orator, and Director of the TSU Debate Team, to document the university’s Model Cities Program, which provided a chance for the artist to photograph various Houston neighborhoods (Trinity Gardens, Sunnyside, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards). Hudnall discovered reminders of his own life in these Houston enclaves that influenced the photographer to capture the simple, yet memorable moments of how one lives from day to day. *“I felt that I was documenting my own community and culture by photographing the daily life of these neighborhoods,”* said the artist. Impressed by Hudnall’s artistry and photographic style, Dr. Freeman commissioned him to continue documenting the families, individuals, elders, and children in these neighborhoods. The assignment had a lasting impact on Hudnall as an artist, as he continued to photograph these same communities throughout his career and has produced some of his strongest work from these historic areas of Houston.







Earlie Hudnall, Jr., *Feeling the Spirit, Third Ward, Houston, Texas, 1987*  
Gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of the Artist and PDNB Gallery

During his studies at TSU, Hudnall had the opportunity to study with Dr. John Biggers, the notable painter, muralist, and art educator, who founded and developed the art department at TSU along with Carroll Harris Simms. Both Biggers and Simms were influential mentors to so many of Houston's most notable artists, including Hudnall. One of Hudnall's favorite quotes by Dr. Biggers was that *"Art is Life. One must draw upon his personal experiences from family and sense of community."*

Hudnall received a BA in Art Education from Texas Southern University in 1976. After graduation, he worked various part-time jobs photographing weddings and events, as well as for publications like the Houston Informer and Ebony Magazine until 1979 when he was offered a full-time position at TSU as the Staff Photographer. He was later appointed University Photographer at TSU in 1990 and was in the position until his retirement in 2020.

In talking about his work, Hudnall states: *"I chose the camera as a tool to document different aspects of life: who we are, what we do, how we live, what our communities look like. Various patterns are interwoven like a quilt into important patterns of history. A unique commonality"*





Earlie Hudnall, Jr., *The Guardian*, 1990  
Gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of the Artist and PDNB Gallery

*exists between young and old because there is always continuity between the past and the future. The camera really does not matter – it’s still just a tool. What is important to me is the ability to transform an instant – a moment – into a meaningful, expressive, and profound statement – some personal, some symbolic, and some universal. My photographs are archetypes of my own childhood. They represent a literal transcription of actuality – the equivalent of what I saw or felt. The viewer can accept the image as one’s own and respond emotionally and aesthetically to the captured image."*

Hudnall has been actively photographing for almost thirty years and his photographs have been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions in galleries and museums locally and around the world, including the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA (2021); Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL (2021); Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX (2020, 2016, 2011, 1991,1991); Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands (2019); Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, TN (2014); Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC (2012); Centro Cultural Borges, Buenos Aires, Argentina (1996); Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL (1993); de Meervaart Cultural Center, Amsterdam, Netherlands (1991); and many others.





Earlie Hudnall Jr., *Flipping Boy, Fourth Ward, Houston, Texas*, 1983  
Gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of the Artist and PDNB Gallery

His compelling documentation of community, families, and daily life has become influential to many artists and photographers and impacted how African American culture is depicted. Most notably, James Laxton, the cinematographer for *Moonlight*, which won an Oscar for Best Picture in 2017, cited Hudnall's work as inspiration for depicting Black people in the film.

Hudnall's work is represented in numerous permanent collections including the Amon Carter Museum, Ft. Worth, TX; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; The Menil Collection, Houston, TX; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; Museum fur Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany; and Studio Museum of Harlem, NY. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2020 Visual Artist Award by the Texas Commission on the Arts, and was honored by FotoFest in 2019. In 2021, the City of Houston, led by Mayor Sylvester Turner, designated June 12, 2021, as Earlie Hudnall Day.



His work has been featured in numerous publications including Luncheon Magazine No. 11: *On Photography: Earlie Hudnall, Jr. and Rahim Fortune in Conversation* by Reginald Moore (2021); Time Magazine: *I'm Just Trying to Photograph Life as I See It. Earlie Hudnall Jr. Has Spent More Than 40 Years Documenting Historically Black Neighborhoods in Houston* (2020) and *Photographic Memory: The Importance of Preserving Community History* (2017).

Hudnall lives and works in Houston, TX, and continues to photograph life in the community and around the city, printing his photographs in a darkroom behind his house in Third Ward.







Melanie Lawson & John Guess, Jr. (photo: Karen Sachar)

## **2022 Texas Patrons of the Year Melanie Lawson & John Guess, Jr.**

For more than 40 years, Melanie Lawson & John Guess, Jr. have generously given their time, talent, and support towards building a stronger arts community. They bring unparalleled energy, and commitment to their philanthropic work, throughout their extensive reach, independently and together, into Texas's arts communities. They have contributed significantly to the arts in the region by building bridges; connecting people; championing artists and forging genuine partnerships with diverse communities to foster lasting and positive change.

A proud long time Houstonian, Melanie Lawson is an award-winning journalist who has had a varied and exhilarating career at ABC-13, covering virtually every city, state, and national elections, and traveling to Cuba, Panama, Australia, Sudan, and South Africa, among other national and international locations. She's won numerous awards for her reporting, including three Emmys, and is well-known for her in-depth interviews with a wide range of notables, including three U.S. Presidents, Vice-President Kamala Harris, prima ballerinas Lauren Anderson and Misty Copeland, the Dalai Lama, legendary journalists Barbara Walters, Robin Roberts, and Ann Curry, the late poet Maya Angelou, gospel superstar Yolanda Adams, former heavyweight champion boxer George Foreman, film directors Tyler Perry and Spike Lee, evangelists Joel and Victoria Osteen,





and actors Betty White and Denzel Washington. Melanie also reported on stories as wide-ranging as Houston's first Black and female mayors to natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey and the deadly 2021 Texas ice storm to the global careers of superstar performer Beyoncé and Destiny's Child. But Melanie's favorite stories are those about Houston's rich, multi-ethnic community - especially stories about children and those quietly working to make a difference in their lives.

Melanie's involvement in the Houston arts community is far-reaching. She has collaborated with numerous community organizations, including Houston Ballet, SHAPE Community Center, Asia Society, the Rothko Chapel, the Houston Museum of African American Culture, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Children's Defense Fund, Volunteer Houston, the Ensemble Theatre, and the Houston Association of Black Journalists. She is also a member of the Texas Lone Star Chapter of Emmys, Women in Film and Television, and the American Leadership Forum. She belongs to the Houston Chapter of The Links Incorporated, and Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. In addition, Melanie is a former member of the Board of Trustees at Princeton University. Melanie has been honored as the YWCA's *Outstanding Women of the Year* and has lifetime achievement awards from the Houston Press Club, Houston Community College, Women in Film and Television, and the Houston Association of Black Journalists. She has also been named a *Women of Distinction* by the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation and given the Ben and Julie Rogers Ecumenism Award from the Anti-Defamation League. Melanie received her undergraduate degree from Princeton University and a joint degree in Law and Journalism from Columbia University. She worked at a Wall Street law firm for three years before returning to Houston and broadcast journalism. She is a member of both Texas and New York State Bars. Furthermore, Melanie is a proud member of the church founded by her parents, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church.

A lifelong resident of Houston, John Guess, Jr. has dedicated his life to supporting and advocating for artists and organizations involved in education, arts, and community. The busy native Houstonian is the unrelenting voice and architect behind the resurgence of the Houston Museum of African American Culture (HMAAC), where he currently serves as Chief Executive Officer. John's efforts to build an influential and boundary-breaking museum have been recognized by the American Alliance of Museums, and MuseumNext, and have led the organization to unprecedented national prominence. He has kept the museum involved in national arts and culture discussions, especially difficult ones. Most recently he negotiated for HMAAC to become the only African American cultural asset to own and interpret a Confederate monument. He has also spearheaded partnerships with national filmmakers to position the museum as Houston's Black Film House while overseeing numerous exhibitions and art projects which routinely receive national coverage in the New York Times, Washington Post, Smithsonian Magazine, and are cited in several books on art and Houston.



Kermit Oliver, *I have read of birds raining from the sky, so upon a cardinal cloth, I have gathered a darkling*, 2001 (left), Richard Marquis, *Wall Hanging Sculpture*, 1985 (center) and Kermit Oliver, *A Ruffled Monkey Before a Topiary Garden*, 2004 (right). Image courtesy of the Collection of Melanie Lawson & John Guess, Jr.

In addition to supporting the arts, John has a long history of giving back to his community through community involvement and pioneering programs. This includes serving as a former Board Chair of Reach Across Houston, a former Cisco Networking Academy, that under John's direction was recognized in Washington, DC for its efforts to bring technology to the community level. John is the only two-time Chairman of the Board of St. Vincent's House, a mission of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. He also served on the Advisory Board of the Dr. Marnie Rose Foundation, which raised funds to benefit brain cancer research at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and pediatric initiatives at Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital. He also served on the Board of the Fred C. Johnson Foundation, which has provided college scholarships to over one hundred fifty kids. Additionally, John also serves on the McKinsey & Company Global Survey Panel, a group of fifteen hundred panelists around the world that is periodically surveyed about economic, business, and industry conditions affecting the world, the United States, and organizations. In 2017, John became the first African American to be honored by the Nigerian American Multicultural Center for his support in Houston of issues pertinent to Africa.





Over the years, John has served on numerous Executive and Advisory Boards at arts organizations throughout the Texas region including the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Glassell School, and Core Program as well as the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), where he founded the well-known *Champagne & Ribs* fundraiser and co-chaired the committee that established CAMH's museum motto, *Always Fresh, Always Free*. He also served as Board President of Art Lies, when the journal became full color, nationally distributed, and part of the prestigious Warhol Foundation Writers Initiative; and Houston Arts Alliance, where he served as Vice Chairman, Treasurer, and Strategic Planning Committee Chair. Nationally, he serves as Chair of the Trustees Committee of Artadia, which sponsors artist awards and support in San Francisco, Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, and Boston. Locally, he serves on the Board of Gulf Coast Journal; University of Houston Public Art Committee; and Houston Museum District Board.

John also serves as Managing Consultant of the Guess Group Inc., Vice President, and Senior Consultant at ACCESS Seminars and Consulting Services, and is former Managing Director of Just Right Entertainment. The Guess Group, Inc, is the recipient of the Greater Houston Black Chamber of Commerce Pinnacle Award for African American Business Achievement. In Dallas, Access Seminars is a past recipient of the Quest Award for Outstanding Business, the Texas Workforce Commission President's Award, and the Dallas Black Chamber's Outstanding Business Award. With Just Right Entertainment, John has produced three award-winning films, *The Hand We've Been Dealt: Borderline Houston* and *Telling Our Story: Conversations on Race, Reconciliation* and the *Future of the Black Church in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas*, and the cult classic film *Bert* about the late Houston artist Bert Long, Jr., and co-produced a Town Hall meeting hosted by Alfre Woodard and Hill Harper for the Congressional Black Caucus at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. His hectic work schedule often includes speaking on business and organizational strategy for groups such as Inc. Magazine, the University of Florida Museum Studies Program, the American Alliance of Museums, MuseumNext, and the Charlotte, NC Chamber of Commerce and writing articles for numerous newspapers and magazines. John has interviewed live national and world leaders including Nobel Prize Winner Wole Soyinka, MacArthur Fellow Joyce Scott, and Dr. Cassius Lubisi, former Presidency Director-General for the Republic of South Africa.

John received degrees in History and International Affairs from Johns Hopkins University, where he co-founded the Black Student Union, served as the first African American student government President and provided sponsorship of the Office of Multicultural Affairs Diversity Awards, formerly known as the Guess Awards, as well as providing funds for African American student's summer internships here and abroad. John's support for Johns Hopkins continues as the largest non-University funder of the JHU Black Student Union. Before returning to Houston in the late 1980s, John had a





successful career in politics and finance. Right out of college, he was Campaign Manager for the Baltimore mayoral campaign of State Senator Clarence J. Mitchell, III. Subsequently, he became a Legislative Investigator on the first Congressional Black Caucus staff and Senior Legislative Assistant for the Hon. Parren J. Mitchell, MC, where he helped draft legislation for the impeachment of former President Richard Nixon but more importantly for the federal government program establishing minority business set-asides to help level the economic and business playing field.

Both Melanie and John are enthusiastic collectors of African American, glass, and contemporary art. Works from their collection have been exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX; Roswell Museum & Arts Center, Roswell, NM; Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, TX; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, TX; Bellville Museum of Art, Bellville TX; and the Afrika Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands. They have donated works from their collection to both the Menil Collection in Houston and the Blanton Museum in Austin, and have been honored by the Community Artist Collective, Houston, TX; Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX; DiverseWorks, Houston, TX; Bayou City Arts Festival, Houston, TX; and the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, TX.





## ABOUT ALH AWARDS

### Texas Artist of the Year Award

In 1983, ALH established the Texas Artist of the Year award as a dynamic project documenting Contemporary Texas art history. The award recognizes artists who have demonstrated exceptional creativity and outstanding achievement, and whose work has had a significant and positive impact on contemporary visual art in Texas. Those who have been recognized have already produced a significant body of work and stand apart as leading figures and visionary talents within the field of contemporary art in Texas. Artists are nominated by a panel of distinguished jurors from across Texas. Jurors determine the award winner and remain anonymous until the winner is announced. Since the inauguration of this award program, thirty-six outstanding artists have received the distinction of Texas Artist of the Year. Past recipients include Vicki Meek, Rick Lowe, Margarita Cabrera, Francesca Fuchs, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Terrell James, Amy Blakemore, Havel Ruck Project, 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

In 1989, ALH expanded the award to include patrons with its Texas Patron of the Year award to honor extraordinary individuals whose efforts have helped advance the work of Texas artists. The award recognizes the essential role of those who have demonstrated remarkable patronage, and whose ongoing commitment to the arts through innovative, community, or sustained support of artistic activity has made a significant and positive impact on contemporary visual art in Texas. Honorees are nominated and selected by a panel of distinguished jurors who remain anonymous until the winner is announced. Since its inception, sixteen outstanding patrons have received the distinction of Texas Patron of the Year. Past honorees include Chinhui Juhn & Eddie Allen, Mary & Bernardino Arocha, Anita & Gerald Smith, Jereann Chaney, Lynn Goode, Poppi Georges Massey, Annise Parker (Mayor of Houston 2010-16), Stephanie Smither, Leigh & Reggie Smith, Judy & Scott Nyquist, Victoria & Marshal Lightman, Leslie & Brad Bucher, Karol Kreymer & Robert Card, M.D., Anne & James Harithas, Gus Kopriva, Clint Willour, Lester Marks, and Sue Rowan Pittman.

### Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts



In 2013, ALH celebrated its 65th Anniversary as an arts organization and the 30th Anniversary of its Texas Artist of the Year award. In recognition of this occasion, Art League Houston established the Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts for artists whose career has spanned more than forty years, and who have made an outstanding contribution to the world of visual art in Texas and beyond. Past honorees include Celia Álvarez Muñoz, George Smith, Jesse Lott, Forrest Prince and Kermit Oliver.

### Lifetime Achievement Award in Arts Leadership

In 2019, ALH expanded the Lifetime Achievement Award to biennially honor visionary and artistic leaders in the community whose creative work has had a positive and long-lasting impact on contemporary visual art in Texas. Past honorees include Dr. Alvia Wardlaw and Betty Moody.

Art League Houston acknowledges the following individuals, private foundations, public funders, and corporations for their support this season:



Catherine D. Anspson • Christian Barker & Dr. Grant Hopping • Minnette B. Boesel • Amy Blakemore • Brown Foundation, Inc. • Jereann Chaney • Rania & Jamal Daniel • Farid Dehghan • Nima Farzaneh • Field of Study • Michael Golden • Zachary Gresham & Pablo Moreno • Harris County Department of Education: CASE for Kids – City Connections • Heights Grocer • Houston Endowment, Inc • Kirksey Architecture • The Levant Foundation • Marlene Marker, The Marker Group • Kathrine G. McGovern • John P. McGovern Foundation in the name of Kathrine G. McGovern • Janet McNeill • National Endowment for the Arts • National Guild for Community Arts Education • Jill Nepomnick • Judy & Scott Nyquist • Crystal & Don Owens • Platt Cheema Richmond PLLC • The Powell Foundation • Saint Arnold Brewing Company • SK Foundation • South Texas Charitable Foundation • Anita & Gerald Smith • Leigh & Reggie Smith • Scott Sparvero • Talley Dunn Gallery • Jacques Louis Vidal Charitable Fund • Workhorse Printmakers • Wortham Foundation • Lauri & Robert Wray

1953 Montrose Blvd.  
Houston, Texas 77006  
[artleaguehouston.org](http://artleaguehouston.org)

