

LABOR ARTS

Ninth Annual Clara Lemlich Awards



May 6, 2019 6:30 – 8:30pm
Puffin Gallery for Social Activism
Museum of the City of New York
Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street

Honoring those who, in the words of the poet Marge Piercy,
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shadows...
who do what has to be done, again and again.

Mediterranean Blue

–Naomi Shihab Nye

If you are the child of a refugee, you do not
sleep easily when they are crossing the sea
on small rafts and you know they can't swim.
My father couldn't swim either. He swam through
sorrow, though, and made it to the other side
on a ship, pitching his old clothes overboard
at landing, then tried to be happy, make a new life.
But something inside him was always paddling home,
clinging to anything that floated – a story, a food or face.
They are the bravest people on earth right now,
don't dare look down on them. Each mind a universe
swirling as many details as yours, as much love for
a humble place. Now the shirt is torn,
the sea too wide for comfort, and nowhere
to receive a letter for a very long time.

And if we can reach out a hand, we better.

The Clara Lemlich Awards

The Awards honor women who have been working for the larger good their entire lives, in the tradition of those who sparked so many reforms in the aftermath of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire over one hundred years ago.

“I’VE GOT SOMETHING TO SAY” shouted the 23-year old Clara Lemlich in her native Yiddish during a tense, crowded meeting of garment workers in Cooper Union’s Great Hall in 1909. Rising from the audience, she interrupted Samuel Gompers and the other union leaders on stage. Her speech inspired the crowd, leading to an unexpected vote to strike, and to what would become known as the Uprising of 20,000.

Born to a Jewish family in the Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire), Lemlich migrated to the U.S. in 1903, found work in the garment industry, and soon became active in the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. The 1909 strike led to reforms, but the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory was a hold-out, and refused to implement safety improvements.

The fire that took 146 lives on March 25, 1911 was seen across the country as a tragedy that could have been avoided, and it sparked a movement that pushed politicians to accept a new notion about the responsibilities of government. Lemlich continued to be active in the labor movement until she was pushed out for her leftist politics. She continued to work for women’s suffrage, led a boycott of butcher shops to protest meat prices, campaigned for unemployment relief, and fought for tenants’ rights.

One hundred and eight years later we are proud to honor her legacy and to honor those who follow proudly in her footsteps.

2019 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES



Elba Cabrera, legendary supporter of Latino artists, is one of three sisters who changed the cultural landscape of New York, particularly the Bronx, through literature, literacy, the visual and performing arts, and political advocacy.

Her personal relationships with artists and musicians and writers helps expand her service to the Association of Hispanic Arts, the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, the Hostos Center for Arts and Culture and other cultural institutions.



Philoïne Fried is the daughter of two iconic labor leaders, Bessie Abramowitz and Sydney Hillman, and she supported her parents' work in many ways throughout her lifetime. Her efforts have been extremely effective - but almost

always behind the scenes. She worked for decades with the Jewish Labor Committee, and is a founding member of the New York Labor History Association, where she served as a superbly effective treasurer until only a couple of years before her 100th birthday.



Dr. Melissa Freeman granddaughter of a slave and graduate of Hunter College, studied medicine at Howard University, and has been practicing medicine since 1961. She was on the front lines of opioid addiction treatment nearly half a century ago, pioneering the use of methadone maintenance programs for women, and continues to this day devoting part of her time to an addiction clinic affiliated with Beth Israel. She opened a private practice in Harlem in 1981, where she continues to see patients.



Doris Deither, Greenwich Village housing activist, is the longest-serving community board member in Manhattan, and has been standing up on behalf of affordable housing since 1960. Her many successes defending her community against developers and politicians haven't all been limited to the village, or to historic buildings; she started her activism with a protest against the powerful Robert Moses over a plan to do away with Shakespeare in the Park.



Ronnie Eldridge is an activist, feminist politician and talk show host. She advocated for women from within as a Special Assistant to New York City's Mayor John Lindsay, and as the only female member of the cabinet of New York Governor Mario Cuomo, heading the Division for Women. After a stint spearheading Special Projects for *Ms. Magazine*, she went on to represent the Upper West Side on New York's City Council from 1989 to 2001. Her weekly television talk show "Eldridge & Co." appears on CUNY TV.

HONOREES FROM PREVIOUS YEARS

We miss these honorees who died since we last gathered.

Lois Spier Gray *labor scholar, labor educator, labor activist.*

Marie Runyon *lifetime tenant advocate*

Mary Sansone *activist and community organizer*

Jackie Steiner *singer songwriter, organizing with music*

Eleanor Tilson *labor leader, benefit fund innovator*

Joan Wile *songwriter and granny militant*

2018 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Anne Cunningham *women's rights and affordable housing*
Mirene Ghossein *Arab-American culture and poetry*
Evelyn Jones Rich *educational advocacy and social justice*
Alix Kates Shulman *feminism, literature civil rights*
Doreen Wohl *fight against hunger*

2017 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Aisha al-Adawiya *strengthening the voice of women in Islam*
Vinie Burrows *actor working for civil rights and peace*
Lidia Correa *community activist and garment union organizer*
Mary Douglas *hospital and hospice volunteer*
Ingrid Frank *human rights and peace organizer*
Lubow Wolynetz *preserving Ukrainian cultural traditions*

2016 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Teresa Chan *Chinatown community organizer*
Etta Dixon *Brooklyn community organizer, dancer, wellness guru*
Bea Klier *climatologist, science educator, women's leadership*
Naomi Replansky and Eva Kollisch *literary and cultural creators*

2015 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Winifred Armstrong *environmental and economic policy activist*
Julie Azuma *advocate for Japanese Americans and autistic children*
Sylvia Gutierrez Grant *hospital workers 1199 union organizer*
Lillian Lifflander* *peace activist*
L. Ann Rocker *environmentalist*
Gloria Sukenick *feminist and tenants' rights organizer*
Mimi Stern-Wolfe *organizing with music*

2014 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Barbara Bailey *NYC Labor Chorus co-founder*
Marilyn Frankenstein *social justice through mathematics*
Jane Kalmus* *voter registration*
Judy Lerner *peace and women's rights activist*
Joan Levine and Sarah Martin *environmental community
organizing in West Harlem*
Agnes Wong *garment worker organizer and Chinatown
community activist*

2013 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Molly Klopot *lifelong activist for peace and justice*
Natalie Gordon *social worker, NORC advocate*
Lois Gray* *labor scholar, educator and activist*
Glendora Folsom Buell *philosopher, judicial activist*
Julia Rosario Jorge *labor activist*
Marian Thom *labor activist, bilingual paraprofessional*

2012 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Judy West *jazz singer, tenant organizer*
Jackie Steiner* *musician, anti-fascist activist*
Betty Reardon *feminist peace educator*
Juanita Nelson* *war tax resister*
Connie Ling *garment worker organizer*
Connie Hogarth *agitator for civil rights and the environment*

2011 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Kathy Andrade *pioneer immigrant activist*
Virginia Baron *still fighting for peace and for women*

Dorothy Burnham *grass roots civic leader*
Monnie Callan *lifelong union organizer*
Dorothy DeVouse* *defender of parents*
Frances Goldin *tireless literary agent*
Kathy Goldman *empowering the poor, feeding the hungry*
Shui Mak Ka *Chinatown garment worker organizer*
Elaine Katz* *keeping Yiddishkeit alive*
Lillian Kimura *advocate for WWII internees*
Rebecca Lepkoff* *humanitarian photographer*
Rita Margules *Clara Lemlich's daughter, housing organizer*
Annie B. Martin* *pioneer chemist, unionist, and activist*
Louise Meriwether *dedicated peacenik, powerful writer*
Charlene Mitchell *peace movement agitator*
Shirley Novick * *centenarian troublemaker*
Ethel Paley *created patient advocacy organization*
Lillian Pollak* *novelist of radical politics*
Suki Terada Ports *professional AIDS agitator*
Lillie Pope* *educator and activist*
Maria Portalatin* *educator/activist for Latin American rights*
Wendy Rodriguez *parishioner activist*
Marie Runyon* *intrepid tenant leader*
Mary Sansone* *lifelong activist and community organizer*
Maddy Simon *music and culture orchestrator*
Jessie Taft Smith* *union campaigner*
Sylvia Thompson* *community rabble rouser*
Eleanor Tilson* *feminist healthcare expert*
Ida Torres* *labor stalwart*
Joan Wile* *songwriter and granny militant*

* deceased

SPEAKERS

Lemlich Family Clara Lemlich's daughter Rita Margules received a Lemlich Award in 2011, and she and other family members have enriched the "I've Got Something to Say" ceremony every year since.

The New York City Labor Chorus, with 75 members representing over 20 labor unions, was founded in 1991. The Chorus promotes union solidarity by expressing through song the history and ongoing struggles of workers for economic and social justice. Its dynamic repertoire combines the power and culture of union music with the great gospel, jazz, classical and folk traditions.

Whitney Donhauser is President and Ronay Menschel Director of the Museum of the City of New York. She came to MCNY in 2016 from a 23-year career in museum management at the Metropolitan Museum of Art including policy and Masterplan development, capital projects such as the Fifth Avenue Plaza and MET Breuer, and fundraising.

Esther Cohen writes, teaches, raises money, curates, art directs, and works hard to secure roses for every struggle. She directed Bread and Roses 1199/SEIU for decades, is a co-founder of Labor Arts, the author of five books and active in the National Writers Union. She writes a poem a day at esthercohen.com.

Rachel Bernstein, a founder of LaborArts, teaches and writes about public history and is author, with the late Debra E. Bernhardt, of *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: A Pictorial History of Working People in NYC*.

Aiyana Smash is a 19 year-old singer, songwriter and musician from Mount Vernon, NY and an alumni of Harlem School of the Arts. She has performed at venues such as the world famous Apollo Theater, Steinway Hall, the Highline Ballroom and the Plaza Hotel.

Christina Jimenez is a freshman at New York University's Tisch School Of Drama-New Studio On Broadway, and the first prize winner of a Mabel Mercer Foundation American Songbook competition in 2018.

Jacqueline Ebanks is the director of the NYC Commission on Gender Equity, and previously headed the Women’s City Club of New York, a hundred year old nonprofit activist organization.

Joe Doyle teaches history and is the UFT representative at Newtown H.S. in Elmhurst (Queens). He is a long-serving board member of the New York Labor History Association.

Gale Brewer has been Borough President of Manhattan since 2013. Previously she represented the Upper West Side in the NY City Council, working on legislation helping domestic workers, requiring NYC publications to be made available via the Internet, and more.

Breana Clarke is an award winning writer whose latest novel is *Angels Make Their Hope Here*, and she is co-founder of the Hobart Festival of Women Writers.

Katie Goldstein is a housing justice organizer who has been working for a more just housing system in New York and nationally for over 10 years at Tenants & Neighbors, and now at the Center for Popular Democracy.

Muzzafar Chishti, a lawyer, is Director of the Migration Policy Institute’s office at New York University School of Law, and executive director of the 21st Century ILGWU Heritage Fund.

Sasha Matthews is a cartoonist, activist, and 9th grader. Her Everyday Superheroes fundraiser collected over \$11,000 for the ACLU. Her comic about migrant family separation was published by The Nation. For more info, including her conversation with Senator Kamala Harris, see rumblecomics.com - o r - [@rumblecomics](https://twitter.com/rumblecomics).

Perry and Gladys Rosenstein are directors of the Puffin Foundation, dedicated to “...continuing the dialogue between art and lives of ordinary people.” The Puffin Gallery for Social Activism at MCNY hosts the Lemlich Awards tonight.

Neal Rosenstein is the Vice President of the Puffin Foundation; find out more about itsr programs at puffinfoundation.org.

Rose Imperato has been a guiding light and driving force with the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition since its founding in anticipation of the 2011 centennial. She currently works as an administrator at the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies.

Isaiah Rivera is a Staten Island-based writer, activist, poet, and graduating senior of CUNY/Brooklyn College where he led the school's Puerto Rican Alliance (est. 1968), dedicated to the advancement, education, and unity of Black and Latinx people across the diaspora; this fall he begins a master's program at Columbia University.



Prints of Clara Lemlich as an Everyday Superhero – part of ninth grade cartoonist Sasha Matthews' series – will be presented to this year's Lemlich Award honorees.

Remember the
Triangle Fire
Coalition

1911
ONE HUNDRED YEARS
2011

Find out about today's issues and help build the long-awaited
memorial at rememberthetrianglefire.org

We invite you to visit the Puffin Gallery
for Social Activism upstairs in this
Museum, and to tour the Puffin
sponsored exhibit



The Puffin Foundation, Ltd.

**City of Workers, City of Struggle – How Labor Movements
Changed New York**

May 1, 2019 – January 5, 2020



May is Labor History Month - celebrate at the

Workers Unite! Film Festival

May 10 – 22

WorkersUniteFilmFestival.org



The ninth annual Clara Lemlich Awards are generously funded by The Puffin Foundation and 21st Century ILGWU Heritage Fund. They are hosted by LaborArts, the Puffin Gallery for Social Activism at the Museum of the City of New York, and the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, and were organized by Rachel Bernstein, Esther Cohen, May Chen, Sherry Kane, and Rose Imperato. Many thanks to Judith Fitzgerald, videographer, Gary Schoichet and Peter Odabashian, photographers, and Anne Newman Bacal, Tanya Beltran, Larry Bush, Shanika Carlies, Charlene Carlies, Anuska Corbin, Alexis Perez, Erika Perez, Terry Schwadron, Ruth Sergel, Laura Tolkow, the NY Labor History Association, and *Jewish Currents*. We are grateful for the continued expert support of MCNY staff, particularly Samantha Fleck, Cherisse Challenger, Sarah Seidman, and Sarah Jackson.

Remember the
Triangle Fire
Coalition

