

LABOR ARTS

Sixth Annual Clara Lemlich Awards



May 9, 2016 6:30 – 8:30pm
Puffin Gallery for Social Activism
Museum of the City of New York
Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street

“I want to be able to look my children in the eye some day and say *I tried to stop that*” said Debra E. Bernhardt at a demonstration against military expenditures in the early 1980s – capturing the sentiment of Lemlich honorees from 2011 through today.

To Be of Use

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

— Marge Piercy

"I've Got Something to Say" 2016 PROGRAM

Prelude New York City Labor Chorus

Welcome Whitney W. Donhauser, MCNY Director

Welcome Esther Cohen and Rachel Bernstein

Welcome Edgar Romney, Secretary-Treasurer, Workers United

Jazz Poem Raymond Nat Turner and Zigi Lowenberg

Honoree Teresa Chan Introduced by May Chen

Greetings Margaret Chin, New York City Council

Honoree Etta Dixon Introduced by Patch Schwadron

Clara Lemlich Michael Miller (great grandson)

Honoree Bea Klier Introduced by Tamara Milton

Social Activism Gallery Perry and Gladys Rosenstein

Honorees Naomi Replansky and Eva Kollisch

Introduced by Kathy Chamberlain

Greetings Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President

Proclamation from Mayor De Blasio Katie Unger

LaborArts Donald Rubin, The Rubin Museum

Bread and Roses and Solidarity Forever

New York City Labor Chorus and audience

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.

We honor -- in the words of the poet Marge Piercy -- people who
*jump into work head first / without dallying in the shadows....
who do what has to be done, again and again.*

“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 five years later we are proud to honor her legacy and to honor those who follow proudly in her footsteps.

2016 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES

Teresa Chan



Born in China and educated in Hong Kong, Teresa Chan immigrated to America in 1968. Her first job in NYC was as an accountant at Beekman Hospital, where she interpreted medical and billing matters for Chinese patients. Eight years later, as the secretary to the managing director of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Teresa befriended social workers in the office next to hers and learned about government benefits and programs available to struggling new immigrants. She shared this information wherever she discovered that someone needed help.

When the Garment Industry Day Care Center was founded in 1983, Chan worked as the administrative assistant, and she was often the first and last person that colleagues, parents, children, and visitors saw each day. In addition to managing the books, she became the reliable friend and mentor who advised frazzled new parents on coping with sick or misbehaving kids, styled the hair of the girls after nap time (many of whom looked to her in preparing for their high school proms), inspired children to return as teenage interns, and persuaded young teaching assistants to complete their college educations.

Officially, Teresa retired in 2012. But she continues her outreach efforts as a volunteer at the New York Presbyterian Hospital and elsewhere. Whenever there is an election, Teresa and her husband can be found at a polling station registering, translating, and assisting in the voting process.

Married into the Chan family, Teresa joined the Oak Tin Association, which represents members with the surnames of Chan, Chin, or Chen. Traditionally, the leaders and elders were

exclusively male, but together with Council Member Margaret Chin, Teresa established its first Women's Committee. This breakthrough accomplishment is now celebrating its 14th year.

Chan's commitment has influenced her daughters' contributions to education and government, and it can be seen in every smiling face she greets in her daily walks throughout Chinatown.

Etta Dixon



was born in Brooklyn, New York. She began dancing in her mother's womb and enjoyed dancing as a child. Without a television, she and her friends entertained themselves devising swing dance moves. As a young woman she started going to Harlem's Savoy Ballroom, (the only integrated ballroom in New York),

eventually becoming a competitive dancer in exhibitions, competitions, and contests. The thrill of competition was revived when Lincoln Center's Midsummer Night Swing program began in 1988, and Dixon is still bringing home trophies.

Dance is only part of Dixon's larger concern with health and wellness. She inspires and advises neighbors and clients of all ages about diet, exercise, relationships, and dealing with stress, and offers outreach programs through Brookdale Hospital and the Mount Ararat Center in Brooklyn. Earning a brown belt in Karate and a Bachelor of Arts both at the age of 75, Etta continues to inspire with her dance and her infectious enthusiasm.

The health of the environment is also a passion for Dixon, who was one of the first in her neighborhood to install solar panels on her roof, and continues to encourage conservation in her community.

Traveling throughout the East Coast to reach out to seniors and the elderly, Dixon has appeared in several documentaries and public television programs. Known as the Mature Magic when she performs with her dance partner Bernard Dove, she helped introduce a new generation of dancers to the swing style of jazz music and dance. Today the most well-known of these dances is the Lindy Hop, which originated in Harlem in the early 1930s. While the majority of swing dances began in African American communities as vernacular African American dances, some of the swing era dances Dixon performs, like the Balboa, developed outside of these communities.

Etta Dixon's quiet first career with DC 37 benefited her and spring boarded the start of a second career in dancing and in health and wellness outreach – she is an inspiratory in many lives.

Bea Klier was born in 1916 to a determined 16-year-old mother



who from the start inspired her to always ask questions and to never stop learning. Klier's fascination with the Earth and the cosmos led her to earn a degree in geology from Hunter College in 1937. She worked as civilian meteorologist for the US Air Force during

World War II, high school earth science teacher, researcher of climatology with NASA, and director of education at the Academy of Sciences. She was an activist throughout her life, beginning as a newlywed in the 1930s; with her progressive minded husband she began helping neighbors who had been evicted: "We picked one family, the man was away in the army and the wife was home with two babies. We went to the local grocery store and brought food to the family and then locked ourselves in. Because the marshal was going to come and put the furniture out in the street. And it worked! ...The political climate became better when

Franklin Roosevelt was elected. We began to struggle for unemployment insurance and social security and relief. He was receptive. It is an error of history to say that he created them. He didn't. We did."

Her activism was not limited to the United States. Bea Klier has traveled all across the world, stating: "I want to see things with my own eyes. I have that problem. I don't accept what is written. Cause I know it is easy to lie or mask the truth with fancy words." She has traveled to Costa Rica and Guatemala to do research and see sweatshops for herself. After returning she led an effort to force all businesses in the city to discontinue using those places to manufacture their goods. Later in life, she visited the Arab Emirates, "because I got sick and tired of hearing negative stuff." She told stories of the brave women she met and of the misrepresentation of Al-Jazeera in the American media. She also traveled the world for research and exploration -- at the age of 89, Bea traveled to Madagascar to view solar eclipses. She is still exploring.

Naomi Replansky and **Eva Kollisch** both began their literary



activism in a factory. Born in the Bronx in 1918, **Replansky** **toiled** in factories, starting on an assembly line during World War II in the heyday of Rosie the Riveter, and eventually graduated to operating a lathe. Years later, she trained herself to become a pioneering computer programmer for not-for-profit organizations, starting with the earliest punch cards used by the first giant computers. This variegated background helped Replansky develop into an eloquent poet of the working class. She published her first poems in 1936, and the first collection of

her work, *The Ring Book*, was published by Scribner in 1952. Her 1973 poem “An Inheritance” reads in part:

'Five dollars, four dollars, three dollars, two,
One and none and what do we do? '

This is the worry that never got said
But ran so often in my mother's head

And showed so plain in my father's frown
That to us kids it drifted down.

It drifted down like soot, like snow,
In the dream-tossed Bronx, in the long ago.

I shook it off with a shake of the head.
I bounced my ball. I ate warm bread.

I skated down the steepest hill.
But I must have listened, against my will:

When the wind blows wrong, I can hear it today.
Then my mother's worry stops all play

And, as if in its rightful place,
My father's frown divides my face.

For some decades, Replansky and Kollisch have shared their lives on the Upper West Side. **Eva Kollisch**, an American Jewish author and a professor emerita at Sarah Lawrence College, was born in Vienna in 1925. She was rescued from the Nazis on a 1939 Kindertransport to the United Kingdom, eventually arriving in America in 1940. Like Replansky, Kollisch started out working in factories during World War II, though she eventually became a specialist in German and comparative literature.

Kollisch published the memoir *Girl in Movement* in 2000, about her life as a young Viennese Jewish refugee in Staten Island. One review praises "... the marvel of her youthful, and continuing, commitment to social justice, and her search for more complex visions of freedom. Eva Kollisch could have been swept away by history: instead she turned to grapple with it. In 2008 she published *The Ground Under My Feet*, a meditation on being a Holocaust survivor. Grace Paley described the book as "...beautifully written. It has more history in it than most historians give us."

An activist for over half six decades, in anti-war, feminist and human rights causes, most recently Kollisch is a member of One by One, a small intergenerational group that practices dialogue with the enemy.

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*

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 resistor*

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

PRESENTERS

Whitney W. Donhauser, the President and Ronay Menschel Director of the Museum of the City of New York since January 2016, has had a successful 23 year career in museum management and fundraising. As Senior Advisor to the President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Donhauser worked with the Trustees, Director, and President on major capital and exhibitions projects, museum policy and government relations, and served as the primary contact with the White House for events hosted by President Obama and others.

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

Rachel Bernstein, a co-founder LaborArts, taught in the graduate program in public history at NYU for decades, and works on public history projects with the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at NYU and the Brooklyn College Graduate Center for Worker Education in lower Manhattan. She is author, with the late Debra E. Bernhardt, of *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: A Pictorial History of Working People in NYC*.

Edgar Romney is an organizer and activist with a distinguished career in the ILGWU, its successor organizations UNITE and UNITE/HERE and now Workers United/SEIU. He was the longtime manager of Local 23-25, and now serves as the Secretary-Treasurer of Workers United and as a Board member of the Amalgamated Bank.

Raymond Nat Turner and **Zigi Lowenberg** co founded the jazz poetry ensemble UpSurge. Turner is a NYC activist poet whose appearances have included the Monterey Jazz Festival, Panafest in Ghana, West Africa, and with James Baldwin, CA Congresswoman Barbara Lee following her lone vote against attacking Afghanistan, and many others. Lowenberg has appeared at music festivals, rallies, clubs, bookstores and universities from NYC to New Orleans to San Francisco. Her acting credits include The Lysistrata Project, the Stein-Toklas Project, and John Brown's Truth, an improvised musical.

May Y. Chen devoted a career of more than 25 years to the garment workers' union in New York, as Manager of Local 23-25 and Vice President of UNITE HERE and Workers United. Chen worked at CUNY's Murphy Institute, teaching and coordinating international projects. She

is a founder of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance. Now retired, Chen is an activist volunteer with the causes of workers, women, and Asian American communities and serves as, Board President of the NYS Immigrant Action Fund.

Margaret Chin, NY City Council representative for lower Manhattan since 2010, is a member of the Progressive Caucus, the Women's Caucus, and has twice been elected as an executive member of the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus. She currently chairs the City Council's Committee on Aging. For more than 30 years she has dedicated herself to public service to help immigrants, low income and working families.

Patch Schwadron, a former dancer, has worked as a career counselor to performing artists at The Actors Fund for over 16 years. Since January, she has been focusing primarily on assisting the dance community as Senior Career Counselor for Career Transition For Dancers, now a program of the Actors Fund.

Michael Miller is Clara Lemlich's great-grandson. A sophomore at the Bronx High School of Science, he is a Novice Director on the Speech and Debate team, will be a co-captain of the Congressional Debate team next year, and has been a Student Senate representative for two years. With an interest in social science, he conducted research this year on the effects of gentrification on neighborhoods in New York City. He also plays center field for his school's Junior Varsity Baseball team.

Tamara Milton served as an Environmental Conservation Peace Corps volunteer in Paraguay, 2012-2014, and contributed to climate change research in the Michigan dune system upon return. She currently works for the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation at American Museum of Natural History and will begin a graduate program in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Michigan in the fall.

Perry and **Gladys Rosenstein** are co-founders 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; find out more about their programs at puffinfoundation.org.

Kathy Chamberlain chaired the Women Writing Women's Lives biography seminar, affiliated with the CUNY Graduate Center, for ten

years and remains on their board. She is the author of *Jane Welsh Carlyle and her Victorian World*, forthcoming from Overlook Press.

Gale Brewer is the 27th Borough President of Manhattan, elected in November 2013. She represented the Upper West Side in the NY City council for over a decade, helping to pass legislation helping domestic workers, requiring NYC publications to be made available via the Internet, and much else.

Katie Unger is an independent strategic consultant for labor and social justice organizations and a fourth-generation New York labor activist. She has developed organizing campaigns in the fast-food, laundry and other industries, and recently worked with communities on progressive policies as a Deputy Commissioner of the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit. She is writing an op-ed series about Uber, work, organizing and the new economy in City Limits. @KungerNYC.

Evelyn Jones Rich has been a public school teacher and principal as well as an Associate Dean at Hunter College/CUNY, and an historian of African history. In retirement she served as Executive Director of The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation. She is a co-founder of Labor Arts and a lifelong trouble maker and activist in the fight for civil rights, effective education, and for the rights of senior citizens.

Donald Rubin is co-founder with his wife Shelley Rubin of the Rubin Museum of Art. The Rubin's large collection of Himalayan art provides the core of holdings in the Rubin Museum of Art. Rubin was the founder of MultiPlan, Inc., a major general service PPO health provider. He serves on the board of The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation and is a member of the Global Philanthropists Circle.

The **New York City Labor Chorus**, with 75 members representing over 20 labor unions and District Councils, 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.



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

The Clara Lemlich

SOCIAL ACTIVIST

AWARDS



to honor
unsung activists



The sixth annual Clara Lemlich Awards are generously funded by The Puffin Foundation and The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation. They are hosted by LaborArts, the Puffin Foundation Gallery for Social Activism at the Museum of the City of New York, and the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, and were organized by Evelyn Jones Rich, Sherry Kane, Esther Cohen, May Chen and Rachel Bernstein. Many thanks to Raul Nunez and Brad Segal of Corks on Columbus, and to Anne Newman Bacal, Kuji Lezama-Banks, Anuska Corbin, Veronica Garcia, Elena Palankerina, Kimberly Schiller and her Huntington, Long Island middle school students, Ruth Sergel, Anna Shelkin, Stephanie Thompson, the NY Labor History Association, and *Jewish Currents*. We are grateful for the continued expert support of MCNY staff, particularly Jerry Gallagher, Sarah Seidman, Samantha Fleck and Francesca Bertolini.

We invite you to visit the Puffin Gallery for Social Activism, and to visit LaborArts.org for video of previous honorees and online exhibits, including *"Play it Again, Sam," Songs of the Labor and Progressive Movements of the 1940s*.



May is Labor History Month - celebrate at the Workers Unite! Film Festival May 5 – 26. WorkersUniteFilmFestival.org

LaborArts needs your support to continue programs like these, and our online exhibits. Please consider donating at LaborArts.org.