

# LABOR ARTS

Fourteenth Annual  
**Clara Lemlich Awards**



May 13, 2024 4:00 – 5:30pm  
Puffin Gallery for Social Activism  
Museum of the City of New York  
Fifth Avenue at 103<sup>rd</sup> Street

Honoring those who  
*jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shadows...  
who do what has to be done, again and again.*

-- Marge Piercy

## The Clara Lemlich Awards

The Clara Lemlich 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 Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire), Lemlich migrated to the United States 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.

More than a century later we are proud to celebrate her legacy and honor those who follow with such determination in her footsteps.

## 2024 PROGRAM

*Ode To Workers (Ode To Joy revisited), Bread and Roses, Rockin' Solidarity Forever* New York City Labor Chorus

Welcome Stephanie Hill Wilchfort, Director, MCNY

Welcome Rachel Bernstein and Esther Cohen

Poems Patricia Spears Jones, New York State Poet

Clara Lemlich Michael Miller, Clara Lemlich's great grandson

**Honoree Priscilla Bassett** (Breena Clarke)

Activist women Gale Brewer, New York City Council

**Honoree Muriel Fox** (Amelia Farley)

Puffin Social Activism Gallery Neal Rosenstein

Song - "*Sister*" (from *The Color Purple*) Antoinette Montague

**Honoree Dorthaan Kirk** (Sheila Anderson)

**Honoree Theodora Lacey** (Jeremy Lentz)

Report from the Street Vendors Project Jennifer Salgado

**Honoree Estela Vazquez** (Lucia Gomez)

Triangle Fire Memorial and LaborArts Rose Imperato

Song - *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*  
Antoinette Montague

## 2024 LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES



**Priscilla Bassett** *civil rights activist* - Priscilla Tietjen

Bassett started working for a better world - a world of peace and justice for everyone - in the 1940s, and she hasn't stopped. Since the 1990s she has been a leading advocate for seniors' benefits and services in Sullivan County, working with the Seniors Legislative Action Committee to protect Medicare and Social Security. In her 90s she worked particularly hard advocating for New York Health, the universal health care bill, and to protect the rights of immigrants. Her lifetime of activism started early - while attending Smith College she met her husband Emmett W. Bassett at a protest of a segregated restaurant in Massachusetts. They combined forces to work for civil rights - for the next 70 years. They raised money for Emmett Till's mother (Till was the 14 year old African American boy who was beaten to death for whistling at a white woman in 1955), attended the March on Washington, protested apartheid, and demonstrated for peace in the face of military engagement around the globe. They protested at hundreds of demonstrations, and over the years took in visitors from around the world who were also fighting for peace. It added up to two full-time jobs for each of them - one as passionate advocates for peace and justice, combined with their other full time jobs - her career as a librarian and his as a professor of microbiology.



**Muriel Fox** *feminist leader and author* – Her new book, due out June 18, is *The Women's Revolution - How We Changed Your Life*. Inspired at age 94 to write about the extraordinary (but not

always fully acknowledged) changes wrought by the women's movement, the book covers a lifetime spent fighting for equality - on picket lines and in board rooms. And always with skillful publicity. It covers Fox's co-founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the powerful NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (now Legal Momentum), one of the oldest and longest lasting legal advocacy groups for women. As organizing lieutenant to Betty Friedan and head of NOW's communications, Fox was central in creating both national NOW and its New York Chapter. Her early success in a top public relations agency - a place that originally said "We don't hire women writers" - was key to building a publicity effort that introduced the modern women's movement to the world. She co-founded the Women's Forum of New York and served as its second president, has served on the boards of international corporations and organizations including the American Arbitration Association, the Child Care Action Campaign, International Rescue Committee, and the United Way of Tri-State. She chairs the Veteran Feminists of America, which documents the achievements of the women's movement. At age 96 she remains an influential voice in the feminist movement.



**Dorthaan Kirk** *champion of jazz* - Kirk grew up in Texas and lived in California before moving to the East Coast in 1970 with husband Rahsaan Roland Kirk, a jazz great known for playing multiple horns simultaneously. She managed his career. Kirk was already a jazz fan before marriage, but

her husband introduced her to many musicians and venues, and jazz history. When Rahsaan died in the 1970s, he left Dorthaan with three children and no job. She turned her contacts in the jazz world into a career, including playing a pivotal role in the start up of WBGO Jazz Radio in Newark, New Jersey. Kirk has been a major force at WBGO —the only full-time jazz format station in New York and New Jersey—working in various roles for more than four decades. Called “Newark’s First Lady of Jazz,” she has been active for nearly half a century as a curator and producer of jazz events and community organizer, primarily in and around Newark, New Jersey. Dorthaan’s Place is one of many projects - a monthly brunch series at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center’s Nico Kitchen & Bar started in 2012. She recently hosted the Bright Moments Podcast, a storytelling project. Her extraordinary support for musicians, her constant and creative engagement of the community in the jazz music she loves, and her commitment to jazz education for children, including the WBGO Kids Jazz concert series, have earned her multiple awards. Honoring her jazz advocacy, she was named Jazz Master by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2020 – the highest honor in jazz.



**Theodora Lacey** *integrating schools and housing* –

Veteran science teacher Theodora Smiley Lacey helped Teaneck, NJ, become the first city in the United States to voluntarily integrate its public schools. She was also instrumental in changing discriminatory housing practices. Born into the civil rights movement, her father was

a leader in the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, when they called the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to be their pastor in 1954. Lacey's mother was friends with Rosa Parks, whose refusal to sit in the back of a public bus touched off the 1955-56 Montgomery bus strike, using the church as their headquarters. Teaching in Montgomery at the time, she also worked as a driver and fundraiser for the cause. She met her husband during the boycott. They moved to New York to escape the discriminatory practices of the South, and then to Teaneck, where they found segregated schools and discrimination against Black homebuyers. Their response was to work with the Fair Housing Council of Northern New Jersey, which sent out couples posing as buyers to document owners and realtors who treated Blacks unequally, evidence that eventually became the basis for a major housing discrimination lawsuit. She continues to be active throughout Bergen County, including leading the effort to erect a life-size statue of Martin Luther King, creating an annual conference of students from Bergen County High Schools "Teens Talk About Racism" held at Fairleigh Dickinson University.



**Estela Vazquez** *social justice warrior*

-- Vazquez joined the staff of 1199, the Healthcare Workers union, in 1986. She served for over three decades as an organizer, vice president, and executive vice president. In her words she "was ecstatic to have been able to serve the most extraordinary union and

members for as long as I did." For decades she inspired union members around immigration advocacy, international labor solidarity, voter registration and political action. An effective fighter for workers' rights, women's rights, and immigrants' rights, she rallied support for marches on Washington, lobby days, and political campaigns. She started early, becoming active in 1961 as a junior high school student in the Dominican Republic, demonstrating against supporters of the brutal dictator Rafael Trujillo. Participating in a popular uprising against a new US supported military dictatorship in 1965 landed her in jail. Four months later her mother managed to attain her release, and she immediately left for to New York City, which she has called home ever since. In the late 1960s, she became active in the movement against the Vietnam War, and with African-American and Latino community movements like the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords and El Comite. Through her life, Ms. Vazquez made it her mission to fight for social and economic justice. In the 1970s, she joined the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and was a founding member in 1984 of Latinos for Jesse Jackson. In 2017, she was a board member of the annual Dominican Parade in NYC.

## **CLARA LEMLICH AWARD HONOREES 2011 - 2023**

### **2023**

Angela Fontanez *Black and Latino cultural correspondent*

Olive Freud *quality of life activist*

Velma Hill *civil rights and UFT organizer*

Alice Ip *Chinatown union leader*

Barbara Martinsons *Prison reform advocate*

Anita Weisbord *Holocaust educator*

### **2022**

Dorothy Burnham *107 year old civil rights activist and educator*

Maria Mazziotto Gillan *people's poet*

Dolores Huerta *labor pioneer*

Jeannette Phillips\* *community health leader*

Kathie Sarachild *feminist and abortion rights advocate*

### **2021**

Barbara Dane *activist singer*

Suleika Cabrera Drinane *advocate for the elderly*

Debby King *union fighter*

Wilhelmina Perry *LGBT convener*

Muriel Tillinghast *movement organizer*

### **2020**

Madeline Anderson *pioneering filmmaker*

Arlene Goldsmith *social worker to the neediest*

Kitty Weiss Krupat *defender of immigrants*

Sister Mary Lanning\* *supporter of community members in need*

Gloria Miguel *Spiderwoman theater founder*

### **2019**

Elba Cabrera *legendary supporter of Latino artists*

Philoine Fried\* *behind the scenes activist*

Doris Diether\* *Greenwich Village housing activist*

Ronnie Eldridge *activist and feminist politician*

Melissa Freeman *Harlem physician, addiction treatment pioneer*

## 2018

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

## 2017

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

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

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

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 *Chinatown community and labor activist*

## 2013

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

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

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**

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.

**Stephanie Hill Wilchfort** is the Ronay Menschel Director and President at the Museum of the City of New York. She arrived in September 2023 from the Brooklyn Children’s Museum, where she served as President and CEO for eight years.

**Esther Cohen** writes, teaches, raises money, curates, art directs, and works hard to secure roses for every struggle. A co-founder of Labor Arts, she is author of eight books, most recently of *All of Us: Stories and Poems Along Route 17*. She writes a poem a day at [esthercohen.com](http://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*.

**Patricia Spears Jones** Arkansas-born, she has lived and worked in New York City since 1974. She is a poet, playwright, educator, cultural activist, and anthologist and has been appointed New York State Poet (2023-25).

**Michael Miller** is Clara Lemlich's great grandson. He works as a Senior Strategy Analyst at Accenture Federal Services.

**Breena Clarke** is a prize-winning author of four novels, including *Alive Nearby*, her most recent novel. She's co-founder of The Hobart Festival of Women Writers. [breenaclarke.com](http://breenaclarke.com)

**Gale Brewer** represents NYC's 6th Council District. As Manhattan Borough President (2014-2021) she helped pass legislation to add "caregivers" to the City's anti-discrimination law, and remove criminal history questions from initial employment applications (the "Fair Chance Act").

**Amelia Farley** is a writer and editor based in New York City. She writes about art, infrastructure, and the history of science, and has published criticism in *Artforum* and the *Brooklyn Rail*.

**Neal Rosenstein**, son of Puffin founder Perry Rosenstein, has been involved with the Puffin Foundation since its inception and is currently President of the Board, overseeing the Foundation's grant program. He has served on the Board of the Teaneck Creek Conservancy (currently as its Treasurer) since its beginning in 2001.

**Antoinette Montague** is a jazz and blues singer who uses her art to fight for civil and human rights. She is a founder and CEO of the non-profit Jazz Woman to the Rescue, and she teaches and performs for young and old throughout the tri-state area, including Jazz at Lincoln Center's Syncopated Leadership Workshop, Music on the Inside (for the incarcerated), Jazz Power Initiative, Jazzmobile festivals and their Saturday workshops at Celia Cruz Bronx High School of Music.

**Sheila Anderson** hosts jazz shows on the WGBO radio station based in Newark, New Jersey and writes about music in a variety of media. She is the author of three books, and a free-lance festival producer.

**Jeremy Lentz** is director of special projects at the Puffin Foundation.

**Jenifer Salgado**, the lead organizer with the Street Vendor Project, was born and raised in the Bronx. Her advocacy at SVP pays homage to her family, who turned to street vending when they first arrived from a small town in Guerrero, Mexico.

**Lucia Gomez** is the political director of the NYC Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO. In different capacities, her life's work has been around empowering Latinos, immigrants and their communities to take action through grassroots organizing, leadership development and civic engagement.

**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 academic scholarship and awards coordinator at the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies.

Posters about the honorees are by students from **The Imagine Society**, where young leaders work with adult mentors to help make the world a better place.

**Priscilla Bassett** Mae Jones

**Muriel Fox** Katie Gaffigan

**Dorthaan Kirk** J.S. Student and Resident at  
Green Hill Juvenile Detention Center

**Theodora Lacey** Lucy Jones

**Estela Vazquez** Sofia Corsico-Sánchez

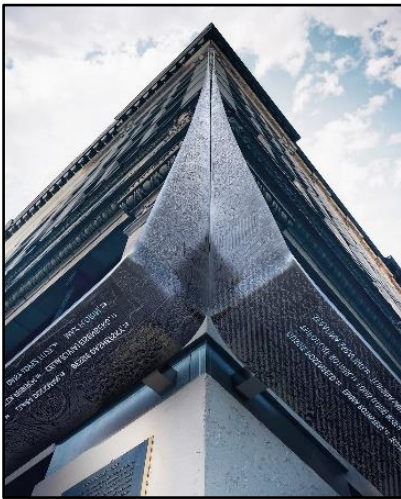


Clara Lemlich as an Everyday Superhero – part of a series created by Sasha Mathews when she was in ninth grade.

We invite you to visit the Puffin Gallery for Social Activism upstairs in this museum.



The Puffin Foundation, Ltd.



## THERE'S A NEW PERMANENT TRIANGLE FIRE MEMORIAL

Over a decade in the making, the new memorial features a “collective ribbon” etched into steel and the names of the victims of the fire etched into black glass.

Visit the memorial at

Washington Place & Greene Street

More information at [rememberthetrianglefire.org](http://rememberthetrianglefire.org)

Remember the  
Triangle Fire  
Coalition





The fourteenth annual Clara Lemlich Awards are generously funded by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ILGWU Heritage Fund and the Puffin Foundation, with contributions from NYU's Tamiment Library and numerous individuals. 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. We are thrilled to be partnering with the Imagine Society youth leaders, and thank Danielle Blumstein for her terrific coordination. Many thanks to Ruth Sergel, filmmaker extraordinaire; Khanyi Ndaba and Peter Odabashian, photographers; Anthony Wong, videographer; Drew Durniak, LaborArts webmaster; and the New York Labor History Association. We are grateful for the continued expert support of MCNY and its skilled staff, particularly Cherisse Challenger.

