

Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Announces 3 Leadership Awards for Outstanding Contributions to Colorado's Arts Community

Colorado visual artist Senga Nengudi, Su Teatro artistic director Anthony "Tony" Garcia, and Access Gallery executive director Damon McLeese to be presented with leadership awards on May 14 at the Four Seasons Hotel

DENVER, CO (April 24, 2019) – Bonfils-Stanton Foundation is set to honor three Coloradans who have left an indelible mark on Colorado's art and culture scene through their creative energy and transformative vision. The [Foundation's 34th Annual Awards Celebration](#) on May 14 will salute the extraordinary contributions of Senga Nengudi, Anthony "Tony" Garcia, and Damon McLeese.

"In 2019, we once again recognize three extraordinary Colorado artists and arts leaders who inspire us, challenge us and make our community more vibrant and equitable. We are so excited to be honoring Senga, Tony, and Damon," said Gary Steuer, Bonfils-Stanton Foundation President and CEO. "Ed Stanton's goal with these awards was to shine a light on achievements by individuals that too often go unsung in our own community, even as they are celebrated nationally and internationally. These honorees exemplify that objective, which remains as relevant as ever."

The 2019 Annual Awards Honorees have advocated for Colorado arts programs that celebrate diversity, promoted Latino culture in Denver through performing arts, and worked to open doors to those in our community with disabilities so that they can enjoy and benefit from the arts.

Artist Award: Senga Nengudi

Senga Nengudi, nationally acclaimed abstract sculptor and performance artist is this year's "Artist" honoree. Senga is being recognized for her creative and moving art that touches on themes such as body image, racial identity, technology, ritual, and labor politics, to name a few. Today, she continues to make art, including poetry, photography and painting that draws on her experiences and observations.

Community Service in the Arts Award: Anthony J. Garcia

Denver native Anthony J. Garcia is the 2019 "Community Service in the Arts" honoree. Tony uses his formidable sense of humor and extensive knowledge of Chicano/Latinx history to inspire and serve his community through his work as an award-winning playwright, musician, composer, educator, social activist, mentor and nonprofit leader.

Arts and Society Award: Damon McLeese

Damon McLeese, Executive Director of Access Arts is this year's "Arts and Society" honoree. For over 20 years, there isn't much Damon hasn't done in his career in the arts. He strives to create platforms for young people to express their artistic soul and further their career pursuits at

Access Gallery. Damon's transformational leadership is dedicated to developing leading-edge programming and innovative social enterprise options, while changing the narrative and bias around disability.

Bonfils-Stanton Foundation believes extraordinary arts and leadership are essential to building a vibrant Colorado. The Annual Awards Program recognizes significant contributions by remarkable Coloradans as Artists, through their Community Service in the Arts, and who foster positive social change through Arts and Society. This year's honorees will receive a \$35,000 award for their exceptional work, inspiration to others and dedication to driving Colorado's arts and culture to new heights.

FOR THE MEDIA:

There are many powerful angles to work with to help tell the story of each honoree that your viewers and readers will love. Would you like to interview any of our distinguished honorees? We will help bring your story to life through vibrant images, engaging interviews and unique angles that will highlight Colorado's arts and cultural communities and the importance Bonfils-Stanton Foundation's Annual Awards has for Colorado.

Reach out to Erica Boniface to get a story in the lineup at Erica@ColoradoMediaNetwork.com or 303-717-8246.

About the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation:

Every day, Bonfils-Stanton Foundation strategically invests in imagination and innovation, because cultivating the creative spark is vital to making our community an exciting place where people want to live, work and thrive. Since its founding, the Foundation has distributed over \$72 million in charitable contributions. Learn more at Bonfils-StantonFoundation.org.

Get to know the 2019 Annual Awards Honorees Now:



SENGA NENGUDI:

Stretched and sand-filled nylon pantyhose, smooth seed pods, Jacquard punch cards, and powdered tempera: these are just a few items that **Senga Nengudi** has used in her work to defy spatial and racial boundaries since the 1970s. She has blended the art of performance, dance, sculpture and installation to bring her work to life and encourage viewers to see everyday objects in a new light. Inspired by the world around her, Senga's art touches on themes such as body image, racial identity, technology, ritual, and labor politics, to name a few. Today, she continues to make art, including poetry, photography and painting, that draws on her experiences and observations. Senga's work has been described as playful, heavy, and defiantly hopeful, and she continues to stretch and defy the boundaries of contemporary art.

A native of Chicago, Senga was raised in Los Angeles and Pasadena where she studied art and dance at California State University and later received her Master's in sculpture. She spent a year

of post-graduate study in Tokyo, Japan at Waseda University. It was in Japan where Senga was introduced to the Gutai performance groups who influenced her work early on. In the 1970's and 1980's, Senga was part of the avant-garde black artists scene that came to be known as Studio Z. The movement consisted of African American artists distinguished by their experimental and improvisational practice. With a passion for education, Senga became a teacher in the arts, with an emphasis on diversity in the communities and organizations she has worked in nationwide. Senga has called Colorado Springs home since 1989 where she was an instructor at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs (1989-2009) lecturing on art history, ethnic studies, women's studies, and visual arts.

Best known for her biomorphic nylon mesh series, "Repondez s'il vous plait," Senga has received national and international acclaim. She has exhibited in Just Above Midtown Gallery in New York, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Galerie Anne De Villepoix in Paris, Museum of Contemporary Art and RedLine Art Center in Denver, DePaul Art Museum in Chicago and White Cube in London, where she held her first solo exhibition, "Senga Nengudi: Alt." Her works are part of the permanent collections of Tate Modern in London, Museum of Modern Art in New York and Centre Pompidou in Paris. Senga's numerous awards for her commitment to arts innovation and education speak to her public recognition as an artist. Along with being an artist-in-residence in multiple prestigious programs, she has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from The Women's Caucus for Art, the Anonymous Was a Woman Award, the Arts and Culture Advocate Award from the Arts, Business, and Education Consortium and the Pikes Peak Art Council, and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award.

Over the course of her career, Senga has served on the board of directors for the Kennedy Center Imagination Celebration, the Tutmose Academy, and the Performing Arts Youth for Youth Organization. She is a founding member of the Sankofa African Dance & Cultural Organization and creator and first director of ARTSpace Community Gallery at the Hillside Community Center.

**ANTHONY J. GARCIA:**

With a formidable sense of humor and extensive knowledge of Chicano/Latinx history, Denver native **Anthony J. Garcia** inspires and serves his community through his work as an award-winning playwright, musician, composer, educator, social activist, mentor, and nonprofit leader. Using sharp wit and political satire, he has been able to bring conversations about gentrification of neighborhoods, racial inequity, immigration, impacts of war, and even the trials of love to light through Su Teatro's varied programming. Tony has touched and transformed countless lives around the country, but it's in Denver where his passion, stories, and civic contributions have made an enduring impression on the community.

As a kid, Tony grew up surrounded by the Chicano movement and was influenced by its tenets around social and political justice and cultural identity. Raised in Denver's Westside

neighborhood, Tony was one of hundreds of Chicanos who were involuntarily displaced to make space for the Auraria campus. He saw first-hand the effects of how social and economic oversight of a community could result in extreme hardship. Tony was shaped by this change but found strength in his identity and voice.

Tony received his B.A. in theater from the University of Colorado at Denver. In 1972, Tony joined the student-organized theatre group Su Teatro as a guitar player and soon became the creative force behind the company. Over the years, Tony grew with Su Teatro, and the company has endured to become the third oldest Chicano theatre in the country. It was in 1989 that he became Su Teatro's Executive Artistic Director. In addition to running the theatre, spearheading its development and subsequent move to Santa Fe Drive, he has expanded the American theatre canon by contributing more than 40 new plays and original works for the stage. He has inspired a new generation of Latino artists and leaders in the process. Through Tony's commitment to cultural equity and a desire to "broaden the mainstream," he has worked to influence arts policy thereby creating opportunities for the Latino arts sector and for the Chicano and Latino community to share their stories, history and experience.

The sphere of Tony's influence is both vast and deep. He's served as a faculty member in the Department of Chicano/a Studies at Metro State College for over 20 years. He is a board member of the National Association of Latino Art and Culture and a former board member of the Western States Arts Federation. His numerous distinctions include being named Denver Post's 2010 Theater Person of the Year, a 2009 Resident Fellow of The Island Institute in Sitka, AK, the University of California Irvine's Chicano Literary Award for Playwrighting in 1989 and was awarded a United States Artists' Rockefeller Fellowship in Theater Arts. In 2011, Tony was also named a Bonfils-Stanton Livingston Fellow.

Tony's commitment to Denver and Colorado is as strong today as it was 40 years ago. He continues to advocate for equitable representation of cultural work and organizations, mentor young artists, contribute to civic change, and shine a light on Colorado's Chicano community.

**DAMON MCLEESE:**

As a storyteller, activist, mentor, creative, and advocate for over 20 years, there isn't much **Damon McLeese** hasn't done in his career in the arts.

But perhaps what is most remarkable about Damon, is his big-heart and passion for helping others, specifically people with disabilities. Damon strives to create platforms for young people to express their artistic soul and further their career pursuits at Access Gallery. As the Executive Director of the organization, Damon's transformational leadership is dedicated to developing leading-edge programming and innovative social enterprise options, while changing the narrative and bias around disability.

Since 1978, Access Gallery's doors have been open to creative, educational and economic opportunities for individuals to access, experience and benefit from the arts. Under Damon's

tenure, Access Gallery has evolved from providing arts education to becoming a national model that delivers economic opportunities for artistic young people, helping them to develop personal financial confidence. This is made possible through several social enterprise and artistic programs launched under Damon's leadership including Artworks, where artists create commissioned pieces of large-scale art for corporate clients; the Community Arts Program, which provides innovative workshops such as *Giving Voice*, where participants learn how to use art for social change; and Access Education, which delivers real-world guidance on how Colorado arts organizations can make accessibility integral to their work. In addition to these programs, Access Gallery employs people with developmental and cognitive disabilities who might not otherwise have traditional jobs. Each year, Damon and the organization serve nearly 500 young adults with disabilities and their families.

As a Denver native, Damon has seen the city evolve over the years into the remarkable creative community it is today. He holds a master's degree in nonprofit management and leadership from Regis University and a bachelor's degree from Metropolitan State College. Damon has worked in the fields of volunteer management and disability services for most of his career. Prior to his time at Access Gallery, Damon worked for Colorado Special Olympics, Easterseals Colorado and was the first director of the City of Aurora Volunteer Center where he worked with the Points of Light Foundation. In 2002, he was elected as the Region 8 Advisory Council Representative to the Very Special Arts National Office. Damon will celebrate 23 years as the Executive Director of Access Gallery in 2020.

Damon's steadfast service to cultivating and inspiring artistic creativity is widely known and has earned him recognition for making significant and lasting contributions to the arts in Denver. He was honored with the 2017 Governor's Creative Leadership Award, the 2014 Mayor's Award for Innovation in the Arts, and was asked to present at the 2016 TEDx Mile High, Make and Believe event.

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