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Contact: Alix Fenhagen

(410) 230-0200

Baker@baltimoreculture.org

GBCA ANNOUNCES THE 2024 BAKER ARTIST AWARDEES

Six artists receive \$90,000 in awards

BALTIMORE, MD – [The Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance \(GBCA\)](#) and the [William G. Baker Jr. Memorial Fund](#) are thrilled to announce the 2024 Baker Artist Awardees. [Judah Adashi](#) (Music), [Kelley Bell](#) (Interdisciplinary Arts), [Albert Birney](#) (Film/ Video), [Nguyễn Khôi Nguyễn](#) (Literary Arts), [Matt Reeves](#) (Performance), and [Stephen Towns](#) (Visual Arts) were selected as this year's awardees.

Each of these artists will receive a \$10,000 Mary Sawyers Baker Prize. From these six artists, [Stephen Towns](#) was selected to receive the 2024 Mary Sawyers Imboden Prize, which includes an additional \$30,000 for a total of \$40,000. Established to be truly transformational to the life and career of one artist, this is the largest art prize in the region.

"Thrilled does not even come close to how I feel about this year's winner of the Mary Sawyers Imboden Prize. Stephen Town's paintings offer intimate and rich insights," said Connie Imboden, President of the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund. Speaking about Town's painting that was recently acquired by the National Portrait Gallery, she noted, "his portrait of Joyce captures her regal presence perfectly!"

Renowned Baltimore artist, Joyce J. Scott, who is the 2016 Mary Sawyers Imboden Awardee and the subject of this portrait, shared, "as a former Baker awardee myself, and true admirer of Stephen Town's multimedia works of wonder, Town's stellar acumen radiates the prowess of his textile/painted combos. Shine on."

The six Awardees were selected by an anonymous jury out of almost 700 Baltimore-region artists who created a free, online Baker Artist Portfolio at www.bakerartist.org. In the past 16 years, the Baker Artist Awards has recognized over 156 artists and awarded over \$1.3 million to artists in the Baltimore region.

"In a time when our country needs the voices of artists more than ever, GBCA is excited to elevate the visibility of those working in the Baltimore region who exemplify the best and brightest among the many talented individuals we have the honor to know," commented GBCA Executive Director Jeannie Howe. "On behalf of our community, we are deeply grateful for the more than 15 years of unwavering support from William G. Baker, Jr. Foundation who has made this internationally engaging program possible."

Along with 2024 Awardees, Stephen Towns and Kelley Bell, 2023 Awardees in Visual and Interdisciplinary Arts, Jordan Tierney and Oletha DeVane, as well 2019 Interdisciplinary Awardee Selin Balci will be showcased in Spring of 2025 in the Baker Artist Awards Exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art, where Towns presented his first museum exhibition, *Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning* in 2018.

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\$40,000 Mary Sawyers Imboden Awardee

Stephen Towns - Visual Arts



Photograph by Malik Dupree

Stephen Towns was born in 1980 in Lincolnton, SC, and lives and works in Baltimore, MD. He trained as a painter but has also developed a self-taught quilting practice. In 2018 the Baltimore Museum of Art presented his first museum exhibition, *Stephen Towns: Ruminations and a Reckoning*. His work has been featured in publications such as the *New York Times*, *Artforum*, *Cultured*, *Forbes*, and *American Craft*. Towns's work is in the collections of thirteen museum collections including National Museum of African American History and Culture, The National Portrait Gallery, and The Baltimore Museum of Art

\$10,000 Mary Sawyers Baker Awardees

Judah Adashi - Music



Photograph by Britt Olsen-Ecker

Judah Adashi's work as a composer is guided by a belief that music can bear witness to injustice, create space for empathy, and serve as a call to action. His compositions are grounded in the classical tradition and imbued with soul and pop influences ranging from Nina Simone to Björk. Adashi is the founder and artistic director of the Evolution Contemporary Music Series and of Rise Bmore, an annual concert marking the anniversary of Freddie Gray's 2015 death while in Baltimore Police custody. He has been on the faculty of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University since 2002.

Kelley Bell - Interdisciplinary Arts



Kelley Bell is an artist, designer, and educator who proudly calls Baltimore City her home. Whether in intimate gallery settings or through grand-scale projection mapping, her projects have delighted Charm City at the American Visionary Arts Museum, Artscape, Transmodern Festival, Sweaty Eyeballs Animation Festival, and Light City. She has exhibited further afield at MoCA L.I.ghts in Long Island, Digital Graffiti in Alys Beach, Dlectricity festival in Detroit, Animafest Zagreb in Croatia, and INTERSECCIÓN Festival Internacional in A Coruña, Spain. Kelley holds a MFA in Imaging and Digital Arts from University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and is an Associate Professor in UMBC's Department of Visual Arts.

Albert Birney - Film & Video



Albert Birney is a Baltimore based filmmaker. He has directed five feature films: *The Beast Pageant* (co-directed with Jon Moses); *Sylvio* and *Strawberry Mansion* (both co-directed with [Kentucker Audley](#)); *Tux and Fanny*; and *Eyeballs in the Darkness*. *Sylvio* was named one of the ten-best films of 2017 by [The New Yorker](#). His films have premiered at Sundance, SXSW, the Maryland Film Festival, Slamdance, and the Ottawa International Animation Festival.

Nguyễn Khôi Nguyễn - Literary Arts



Nguyễn Khôi Nguyễn is a multi-disciplinary artist and educator. He is the author of the Ignatz-nominated comic series, [The Gulf](#) and his cartoons have been featured in [The New Yorker](#). Nguyễn's "[In Our Own Time](#)," is a six-part webcomic for McSweeney's that charts the ups and downs of his and his wife's fertility journey. He is the vocalist/pianist of the jazz trio, [Superior Cling](#) and runs the multimedia cooking website, [Mom's Viet Kitchen](#). Nguyễn teaches digital media at Loyola University Maryland and has received a Rubys Artist Grant and an Independent Artist Award from the Maryland State Arts Council. He lives in Baltimore, Maryland, with his wife and son and looks forward to visiting the Waverly Farmers Market every Saturday. Nguyễn is the first cartoonist to ever be awarded in the Literary Arts category.

Matt Reeves - Performance



Matt Reeves is a dancer, choreographer, filmmaker, and projection/mixed media designer. Since 2007, he has been making work collaboratively as an Artistic Director of Orange Grove Dance, a multimedia dance company that creates visually athletic experiences through the lenses of dance, film, and design. A 2020 Helen Hayes Award winner, Reeves' acclaimed works have been presented worldwide in museums, concert stages, film festivals, underground tunnels, city streets, black box theaters, public parks, and botanic gardens. He holds an MFA in Dance from the University of Maryland as well as a BFA in Dance from the University of Florida.

To read the full artists' biographies or learn more about the Baker Artist Awards and Portfolios, please visit www.bakerartist.org.

About the Baker Artist Portfolios

The Baker Artist Portfolios were created to support artists and promote Greater Baltimore as a strong creative community.

The online portfolios are open to artists working in all disciplines who live and work in Baltimore City and its five surrounding counties. The portfolios expose area artists' work to regional, national, and international audiences. The site has been viewed by hundreds of thousands of art lovers, critics, gallery owners, academics, and leaders in creative business in nearly every country around the globe.

About the Baker Artist Awards

Artists who create a Baker Artist Portfolio are automatically eligible for one of six Baker Artist Awards, which include significant monetary prizes, exhibition and showcase opportunities, as well as a feature on Maryland Public Television's Artworks program. Each year, selected artists share a total of \$90,000 in prize money. Prizes are awarded to artists who demonstrate excellence in areas such as mastery of craft, depth of artistic exploration, and unique vision.

About Mary Sawyers Baker Prize

Mary Sawyers Baker was one of Baltimore's early philanthropists, studied voice as a young girl in Paris and embraced the arts throughout her life. She established the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund in 1964 to honor her husband, a well-known Baltimore civic leader.

About Mary Sawyers Imboden Prize

Designed to be transformational to the life and career of one exemplary artist, the Mary Sawyers Imboden Prize was launched in 2016, when it was awarded to Joyce J. Scott. Mary Sawyers Imboden was the beloved niece of Mary Sawyers Baker and throughout her childhood traveled extensively with her aunt throughout Europe. Mary Sawyers Baker established The William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund in 1964 and upon her death in 1976, was succeeded by Mary S. Imboden on its Board of Governors on which she served until 1999. During her tenure on the board, she was instrumental in forming the Fund's guidelines and procedures to better reflect her aunt's wishes. In addition to making sure each dollar was granted wisely, Mary Imboden wanted to make sure the fund was innovative and specifically met the needs of the city of Baltimore.

About the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund

The William G. Baker Jr. Memorial Fund commits its resources to enhance the region's economy and quality of life by making investments in arts and culture. Its grants support artistic and cultural organizations and their partners through initiatives that enhance an individual's sense of self and pleasure and make Baltimore a more attractive place to live and work.

About the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance

The Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance (GBCA) creates equity and opportunity In, Through, and For arts and culture in Greater Baltimore. A leading nonprofit provider of services to artists and cultural organizations in the region, GBCA believes in unifying and strengthening all members of the creative community. We do this through marketing, education, financial support, and developing innovative programs that increase equity in the cultural sector and beyond. To learn more about GBCA, please visit www.baltimoreculture.org.

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