



2020  
Governor's  
*Arts*  
Awards



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# Montana

## 2020 Governor's **Arts** Awards Honorees

The 2020 Governors Arts Awards honorees are in alphabetical order.



Courtesy of Jerry Rankin, *Golden Sunlight*, 2016, collograph



### Patty Bergquist

**Patty Bergquist has served as director of the Montana Art Gallery Directors Association (MAGDA) since 1989, serving the Montana arts community for more than 30 years to date. Under her remarkable direction, MAGDA has overseen hundreds of traveling exhibitions throughout our state, benefitting hundreds of Montana artists.**

Over the course of Bergquist's tenure, the business of touring exhibitions has changed radically. Whereas national nonprofit organizations previously subsidized art exhibit tours to MAGDA, national funding for the endeavor has since decreased significantly. Amid this shifting dynamic and more, MAGDA's very existence has been threatened. Through Bergquist's loyal commitment to the organization, MAGDA has adapted and continued to serve its members well. Her nimble management has resulted in sponsorships of reasonably priced exhibits, to the benefit of its membership, during these leanest of years.

**Bergquist single-handedly organizes the annual conference that has become one of the most important in the area for artists, art galleries, art museums, arts organizations, art educators and patrons. Described as an opportunity to come together and network, communicate, formulate ideas and be exposed to some of the great art being made in our area, it is a model for art-centered collaboration.**

A proud born-and-raised Montanan, Bergquist is known for having a real love for MAGDA and "her people." MAGDA has brought together museums and galleries from every corner of the state—and North Dakota and Wyoming—and currently boasts 29 member institutions.

In the words of Bergquist's nominator, "Great leaders are hardly noticed because they allow all those around them the liberty to shine at what they do best. You may not know Patty Bergquist, or have ever even heard of her, because—in a world full of those hoping to be art stars—she provided the sky."



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Photograph by Kevin O'Dwyer

## Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild

A nationally regarded sculpture park, **Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild (BPSW)** was founded after a successful international sculpture symposium just seven years ago and has since provided its visitors 365 days of opportunity to experience place-based environmental sculpture in the rarest of settings: 26 acres of wooded land in Lincoln.



## Arlynn (Arni) Fishbaugh

From 1992-2015, Arni served as executive director of the Montana Arts Council. In that capacity, she was a leader in bringing the arts and art education to every county in Montana.

Lincoln has been the center of rich, social, cultural and environmental values. Mining, logging and ranching industries have been the key economic factors that have sustained the community throughout its history. The establishment of the sculpture park has provided ample opportunities for community members and visitors of all ages to enjoy the landscape, artwork and education. Through summer educational programs, students learn local history and build sculptures—modeling the methods of artists featured in the park—out of natural resources found on site.

Now entering its 7th year, BPSW continues to deliver to Montana a world-class international artist-in-residence program. The sculpture park boasts 18 permanent sculpture installations (20 after their next residency), summer and autumn education programs and a variety of community events. Annual residencies have welcomed artists from Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Ireland and the United Kingdom, creating an incredible impact on Lincoln's community. The interaction and camaraderie generated by artists' presence have been nothing short of a breath of fresh air.

The volume of visitors both nationally and internationally has continued to expand, with BPSW's Eco-counter registering 30,000 visitors during 2019. Thanks to its central location in Montana, at the base of the Continental Divide Trail, BPSW allows for hiking in the summer and cross-country skiing in the winter. For hundreds of cyclists and hikers, BPSW is a much-welcomed highlight to their Montana adventure.

As the logging and mining industries have subsided, Lincoln finds itself at a crossroads of economic and cultural development. Reflecting on its history while looking toward the future, the community has chosen contemporary art practice to act as a catalyst. While offering—free of charge—a rich and compelling experience for visitors, Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild has brought a significant boost to the economy and tourism of Lincoln, at once celebrating the rich environment, industry and cultural heritage of the Blackfoot Valley.

During her long tenure with MAC, Fishbaugh became a prominent figure nationally, serving on the board of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP), the Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF), and as a board member for Grantmakers in the Arts. Most notably, she was elected president of the board of directors for the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA). In 2010, her NASAA colleagues recognized her many contributions to the field with the Gary Young Award for Outstanding Service to State Arts Agencies.

A native Montanan raised on a wheat farm near Fort Benton, Arni Fishbaugh graduated from the University of Montana in 1974 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in drama. From there, she went on to the University of California, Los Angeles, where she earned a master's degree in theatre management. For many years after that, Fishbaugh worked in arts marketing at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, as touring director for the Texas Opera Theatre (an affiliate of the Houston Grand Opera) and as associate director of marketing for New York City's Metropolitan Opera.

All of these positions point to a successful career in business and the arts. It is through the work Fishbaugh accomplished for her home state that she made her most significant impact. Arni Fishbaugh is known as an advocate for the necessity of arts education, the positive economic impact of the arts on tourism, and for the enrichment that the arts bring to the lives of all Montanans and their communities.

Of Fishbaugh's leadership, Mark Kuipers, current member of the Montana Arts Council, says this: "Arni marshalled the talents of her staff, the council, artists, arts organizations (local, state and national) to achieve more than they thought possible. She created an environment that makes people want to do more."



Courtesy of Gordon McConnell



## Gordon McConnell

Since arriving in Billings in 1982 to assume the assistant directorship of the Yellowstone Art Museum, Gordon McConnell has contributed in myriad ways to the arts community of his adopted state, becoming an enduring key figure in Montana.

A visual artist and art historian with connections to national artists, scholars, critics and writers, McConnell has a record of ongoing projects celebrating local artists and exposing Montana to preoccupations of the global contemporary art world. He has long been an active participant in the cultural fabric of Montana and of the American West, fostering and promoting contemporary arts while maintaining his own significant and evolving studio practice for more than 30 years. Touring exhibitions throughout the West—as well as across the nation and abroad—have included Gordon McConnell's work.

McConnell's educational background includes a Baylor University, Waco, Texas Bachelor of Arts in studio art, (1972), post-graduate study through the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia MFA program (1973) and a Master of Arts in art history from the University of Colorado, Boulder (1979).

As a young curator in the early 1980s, McConnell quickly became right-hand man to Donna Forbes, Yellowstone Art Museum's longtime director. To her remarkable energy, vision and administrative skills he added—to the evolving Yellowstone Arts Museum—a sense of renewed vision, vital purpose and intellectual distinction. Gordon was the museum's warm human link to working artists around the state, many of whom felt isolated; he consistently encouraged and inspired artists by organizing numerous thoughtful exhibitions that connected them to one another.

McConnell's curatorial realization of visionary museum exhibitions from 1985 onward, combined with critical writing, and the creation and dissemination of his own artwork, have raised international awareness of the visual arts being produced in Montana and, simultaneously, have exposed Montana audiences to critical contemporary questions and a diversity of artists. His work has paved lasting paths through which subsequent and innumerable creators, critics, curators and arts professionals have passed.

A courageous artist who has schooled himself in both the past and the present, Gordon McConnell has not shied away from the difficult issues that often face an ambitious artist in Montana. He is intimately aware of the rich inheritance of history, myth and dream that is suggested by the simple phrase "the American West." He loves the romantic Western version of the American dream, and he regularly expresses that love in his work.



Courtesy of Willem Volkersz



## Willem Volkersz

Willem Volkersz emigrated from his native Holland in 1953, attended high school and college in Seattle, and received his MFA at Mills College in Oakland. He spent time working as a photographer, exploring the coastline, and documenting elements of the popular culture that eventually formed the basis of his artistic vocabulary.

In the years since his 1986 arrival in Montana, Volkersz has become a significant figure in the art environment. His work has been exhibited in every corner of Montana and in all of its major museums, including the Yellowstone Art Museum where he was named Artist of the Year (2016) and the Missoula Art Museum where his work is now included in the permanent collection. His unconventional mixed media works have been shown in 50 solo exhibitions and included in more than 200 group shows across the United States and Canada, as well as in England, Scotland, China and Taiwan.

Volkersz is also a seasoned educator who has shared his gift with countless students and has inspired two generations of artists—many of whom continue to highly value their university experience with him. From 1968 to 1986, Volkersz taught at the Kansas City Art Institute and then joined the Art Department at Montana State University where he taught from 1986 to 2001, serving as Director of the School of Art for six of those years.

Volkersz's own art is both human and humane—stemming from empathy, a graceful joy in human complexity and a resolute abhorrence of injustice. Willem Volkersz lives a life rooted in gratitude, which is abundantly clear to his many students and all who have heard him speak. He has been a collegial and generous partner to the museum professionals who have worked with him, up to and including donations of his work to those institutions that could not afford to make purchases.

While Volkersz's work is unapologetically autobiographical, he knows that the specific experience of one person is rooted in the universal experience of all. His work is a bridge between past and present and between western Europe and the United States; it has expanded the scope of Montana's cultural landscape, resists its stereotyping, and opens the door to young artists to continue to reexamine their relationship to a particular place.



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