

# Visionary Arkansans 2014

They make an impact in science, arts, social justice.

By Clayton Gentry, Benjamin Hardy, Jim Harris, David Koon, Lindsey Millar @lindsey\_millar, Leslie Newell Peacock @eyecandypeacock, David Ramsey and Will Stephenson

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## VISIONARIES

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It's time again for our annual Visionaries issue, a celebration of Arkansans with ideas of transformative power. This year's class is filled with people who are devoted to enriching life here, from theater to the natural environment to education. They've created political action committees (Amanda Crumley, director of the Southern Progress Fund), helped musicians reach an audience outside Arkansas (Jeff Matika of Green Day), worked to give the children of immigrants access to higher education (Rosa Velázquez of United We Dream). Joseph Jones is the founding director of Philander Smith College's Social Justice Institute. David Bailin is an artist of the highest caliber whose drawings make us think. Andrea Zekis lobbies for the rights of transgender people. All 25 are people with clear intent on what they want to achieve in life, and their visions help create our realities.



- David Bailin

- BRIAN CHILSON

## David Bailin

### Artist's fine hand finds humor in human plight.

David Bailin describes his work as Kafkaesque, cites critic Harold Bloom on his website and believes the humor in his work can be compared to that of deadpan comedian Buster Keaton. Yet, he says Arkansas created who he is as an artist and he can't imagine living anywhere else. Bailin, who moved to Arkansas in 1986 with his wife, Amy Stewart, a lawyer, is a cerebral artist whose drawings are narrative works that reflect an evolution of his ideas in archetypical form. As a younger man, there was his larger-than-life Minyan series of 10 exquisitely drawn charcoals of images from the Holocaust overlain by symbols of Kabbalah, as if the symbols of Jewish mysticism could provide a healing blessing on the dead and living. That led to his Midrash series, his interpretations of Biblical stories in larger-than-life-sized charcoals, peopled by men in slacks and belts, women in shirtwaist dresses and purses, Yahweh wearing a tie. That was followed by what he calls the "cubicle" series, scenes of drab offices and desperate or sometimes pointless activity, and after that his "Dreams and Disasters" series. Sitting in the Townsend Wolfe Gallery at the Arkansas Arts Center, Bailin says the "official version" of the inspiration for the "Dreams" series is that "dreams come from the result of dealing with the routine," the daydreams that arise during repetitive or automatic actions, like driving. Which leads us to his work in the 56th annual Delta Exhibition, in which he won the Grand Award for his work "Slippage." (It's his fourth Grand Award.) "Slippage" is a terrifically composed scene, a suburban street lined by trees and homes on a titled horizon — drawn in charcoal, oil, coffee and pastel on paper — in which a man, in a suit, lies on his back under what might be a boulder. The road ends in a swath of white, much like the pillar of cloud that appeared to lead the Israelites from Egypt. Bailin draws and revises and draws some more until the purpose of the work has been achieved and the marks suit him. "Once you get the hook," he said, "it's playtime," and his abstract blobs of orange and green and red dance over the drawing and down the street. Bailin, who

says his studio "has never been my friend," is working on the next outgrowth of "Dreams," about memory and senility. Appropriately, perhaps, he keeps wiping off what he's drawn. "If it was smooth sailing, I'd be making wallpaper," Bailin said. *LNP*