

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

December 2019

Dear School of the Arts Alumni:

I hope this newsletter finds you well and that the ensuing months bring you peace and a wonderful new year. This will be our last newsletter of 2019 (and of the decade!), but we look forward to reconnecting in February. Below you will find updates about your fellow alumni as well as this month's Alumni Spotlight, artist **Nancy Cohen '84**.

FILM

King Lu '19 was awarded an [Armed with a Camera \(AWC\) Fellowship](#) from Visual Communications. Additionally, his film *Hyphen*, produced by **Chengzhi Jin '19**, [screened](#) at the Philadelphia Asian American Film & Filmmakers Film Festival this month. **Avril Speaks '03** was selected as a [2020 Sundance Institute Momentum Fellow](#). *Frozen 2*, written, directed, and executive produced by **Jennifer Lee '05**, is now in theaters. **Anna Gutto '16** directed one of the upcoming episodes of the new Netflix series [Home for Christmas](#). **Roberto Bentivegna '10** is [set to write](#) a still-untitled adaption of the book *The House of Gucci: A Sensational Story of Murder, Madness, Glamour, and Greed*. The film will be directed by Ridley Scott and will star Lady Gaga. *Limetown*, a series written by **Rebecca Thomas '13**, had its season finale on Facebook Watch. You can read about the series in [The Hollywood Reporter](#). **Josalynn Smith '19** was recently awarded a [SFFILM 2019 Science in Cinema Filmmaker Fellowship](#), which comes with a \$35,000 cash grant and a two-month residency in SFFILM's Film House residency space. Her film *Ride or Die* recently screened at the [Twin Cities Black Film Festival](#) as well as the [Williamsburg Independent Film Festival](#).

THEATRE

Amanda Broomell's '09 play [Mandy Picks a Husband](#), which she wrote and performs in, opened at the United Solo Theater Festival's 10th Anniversary season on November 21. **Mustafa Kaymak '14's** play *The Basement* was at the [ReOrient 2019 Festival of Short Plays](#) at Potrero Stage in San Francisco. **Rebecca Henderson '06** stars in [Mickey and the Bear](#), which screened last month at the Film Forum. **Charles Anthony Burks '99** is directing Langston Hughes's [Black Nativity](#) at

Bethany Baptist Church, December 14-15. **Nick Hadikwa Mwaluko '10's** essay "[XXYX Queer Africa: Invisible](#)" was published in *Juked*. *The Trojan Women* is being revived at [La MaMa](#), and stars alums **Kim Ima '96, Julia Martin '96, George Drance '98, Mia Yoo '98**, and is directed by **Andrei Serban** (Professor Emeritus). The show runs from December 6-15. [Endlings](#), a new play written by alumna **Celine Song '14**, will star alumni **Keith Michael Pinault '15** and **Andy Talen '14**. The play will open on March 9 at New York Theatre Workshop.

VISUAL ARTS

Last week [twenty Columbia artists](#) exhibited work at Art Basel Miami Beach. **Rafael Domenech '19** and **ektor garcia '16** are both currently in a group exhibition titled *Searching the Sky for Rain*, which is currently at [SculptureCenter](#) in Long Island City until December 16. School of the Arts adjunct **Liz Phillips** and alumna **Heidi Howard '14's** [Relative Fields in a Garden](#) continues its run at the Queens Museum. Make sure you see it before it closes in February. **N. Dash '10** currently has work in an ongoing exhibition at the [SFMOMA](#) titled *Open Ended*. **Patricia Treib '06** currently has a solo show titled *Limbs* at the [Kate MacGarry Gallery](#) in London, which runs through December 14. This week is also your last chance to see [RomCom](#), an exhibition curated by **Jaqueline Cedar '09** at Good Naked Gallery.

WRITING

"Angel of Mercy," written by **Suzanne Dottino '02** and recently published in the [Bellevue Literary Review](#), has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. "The Christmas Party," written by **Mina Seckin '18**, was recently published in [The Rumpus](#). **Francisco Gonzalez '19** was a finalist in the Arts & Letters 2019 [Unclassifiable Contest](#). **Aaron Poochigian '16** recently had [two poems](#) published in *The Paris Review*. **James Gregor '11** published his first novel [Going Dutch](#) with Simon & Schuster. The book had a great review on [NPR](#). James also did a reading at Shakespeare and Company Bookshop in Paris in October. **Margo Orlando Littell '04** will publish her second novel, *The Distance from Four Points*, with the University of New Orleans Press in June 2020. It's currently available for [pre-order](#). **Afia Atakora '16** will release her novel, *Conjure Women*, in March 2020 via Penguin Books.

Please continue to send your updates to artsalum@columbia.edu, and follow our alumni [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) pages, as well as the Artists' Resource Center's [LinkedIn](#).

Best,
Laila Maher
Dean, Student and Alumni Affairs

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

This edition of the Alumni Spotlight features Visual Arts alumna **Nancy Cohen '84**. If you would like to submit your own stories to be included on our website, you can do so at this [link](#).



Nancy Cohen '84 makes sculpture, drawings and installations in a variety of materials, at this time primarily handmade paper and glass. Cohen's work has been widely exhibited throughout the United States and is represented in important collections, such as The Montclair Museum, The Newark Public Library, The Weatherspoon Art Gallery, and The Zimmerli Museum. She has completed numerous large-scale, site-specific projects including for Thomas Paine Park in lower Manhattan, The Staten Island Botanical Garden, The Noyes Museum of Art, The Katonah Museum of Art, The Textile Museum in Washington DC, Howard University and The CODA Museum in Apeldoorn, NL. Her most recent solo exhibition was *Force: Observations from the Interior* at Kathryn Markel Fine Arts in Manhattan in April, 2019.

Recent group exhibitions include: *Kin* at Accola Griefen Fine Arts, and *Summation and Absence* at BioBAT both in Brooklyn, NY; *The Other Glass: An Alternate History* at Heller Gallery, Manhattan; *Wake* at Dorsky Curatorial Projects in Long Island City; and *New Directions in Fiber Art* at the Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, NJ. Her work has been reviewed in books and periodicals, including *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Village Voice*, *ArtNews*, *Hand Papermaking*, *Glass Magazine*, and *Sculpture Magazine*, and she was recently featured in the [Arttable's Artist Perspectives Podcast](#).

Was there a specific faculty member or peer who especially inspired you while at the School of the Arts? If so, who and how?

Before starting graduate school, I'd had been making sculptural forms but had not studied sculpture as an undergraduate. My first sculpture class was taught by Reeva Potoff. Within 15

minutes I realized I was entirely in over my head. Reeva gave us a verbal list of the books we should have already read, adding the news ones we should be reading that semester. I hadn't heard of any of them nor had I heard of any of the artists she or any of the other students were talking about. From that class on for the next two years there was always something challenging to think about, see, learn or read. It was thrilling.

I took two sculpture classes that year with Reeva and she was my advisor the second year. She was smart, clear, focused, engaged and impossible to please. That combination kept me and my sculptor cohort (there were just a few of us, compared to the painters) working non-stop. Reeva was able to reflect back to us what she was and wasn't getting from what we were making and that taught us how to look critically at what we were doing and push harder. The focus was never on what we should do but rather on understanding what we were doing as a way to help us get wherever we wanted to be. That thinking helped shape me as an artist (and has guided my teaching as well).

How did attending the School of the Arts impact your work and career as an artist?

The academic classes as well as the stimulating conversations with faculty, visiting artists, and fellow graduate students, when combined with seeing tons of art around the city all opened up the world for me. Several people I met became lifelong friends and an important part of my artist community. I am grateful for all of that.

In terms of career, when I was at the School of the Arts there was no discussion about the profession of being an artist (how to make a living or make or sustain a career), the focus was solely on making the work. This was great in one way but also sorely lacking. When we graduated there was also no formal connection to the program. We were left to figure all the rest of that out on our own and it was very hard. I think all of that is very different now.

What was your favorite or most memorable class while at the School of the Arts?

I took a fabulous "Cultural History of the Twentieth Century" class with the critic Dore Ashton.

I also studied choreography at Teacher's College. I was looking at a lot of contemporary dance. In the choreography class the goal was to try and solve visual and conceptual problems with my body instead of with materials. I have zero talent as a dancer so as a default I mostly used my body as a percussive instrument. I had a lot of black and blue marks from that class but it was a great extension of my thinking about form and communication.

What were the first steps you took after graduating?

I went to Skowhegan. Jane Wilson was on the faculty of the MFA program and on the Board of Governors of Skowhegan. She suggested I apply. There was no downtime between my studio at Prentis and starting to work again – new cohort, new faculty, new studio. The new

voices gave me perspective. I didn't have time to worry about how I was going to continue making my work.

At the end of that summer my husband and I got teaching jobs in China and moved to Shanghai for a year. It was 1984, there were very few foreigners in the country. Things were very slowly beginning to open up. It was an entirely new environment, fascinating but with many challenges just negotiating everyday life. In addition, I had no access to any of the materials I was used to working with. So, I started again – how to find what I wanted to say in an entirely new way. It was also a year that helped me get all of the other voices (faculty and fellow students) out of my head. It was a great transition to working on my own in a sustained way.

ALUMNI BENEFITS

- +[Artists' Resource Center \(ARC\)](#)
 - +[Update Your Information](#)
 - +[Email Forwarding & CU Address](#)
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