

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

February 2019

Dear School of the Arts Alumni,

It is with great sadness that we mourn the passing of **Marni Ludwig '08**, Writing alumna and Adjunct Professor. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence, Washington University, and Columbia University, Marni was praised and admired for both the fearlessness of her poems and for her dedication to her students. Her chapbook, *Little Box of Cotton and Lightning*, was selected by Susan Howe and published by the Poetry Society of America. Her collection of poems, *Pinwheel*, was selected by Jean Valentine and published by New Issues Press in 2013. You can read a selection of her poems published by *Boston Review* [here](#). In "Lamb," she writes:

The wish is to vanish. Always
there is the problem of not enough

horizon and then of sex as the means
of deflection. Desire can't be located

only followed into a procession
of hands. I told you feeling

could fix a gesture to its source
but I was thin and I was lying.

You can find more of her poems on her [website](#). Marni will be missed and remembered with deep affection.

As many of you saw yesterday, we are inviting all alumni to participate in writing letters to incarcerated writers. This effort is being organized by the *Columbia Journal*. I'm delighted to report that over 100 volunteers signed up after our invitation. If you would like to learn more about the program or sign-up to volunteer, please [click here](#).

Film

Over 30 School of the Arts filmmakers participated in the Sundance and Slamdance Film Festivals this year. Winning the U.S. Fiction Short Film prize was *Green*, Directed and Co-Written by **Suzanne Andrews Correa '17**. A number of our alumni were involved with the film, including

Producer and Co-Writer **Mustafa Kaymak '14 & '17**, Editor **Pinar Yorgancioglu '16**, First Assistant Directors **Fabio Montanari '16** and **Nicholas Becerra '18**, and Digital Imaging Technician **Emre Gulcan '17**. *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*, Co-Written and Co-Produced by **Rob Richert '13**, received honors for directing as well as the Special Jury Award for Creative Collaboration. *Brittany Runs a Marathon* won the U.S. Dramatic Audience Award. Faculty member and alumnus **Andrew Hauser '12** was the Post-Production Supervisor on the film. At the Slamdance Film Festival, **Nicole Brending '11** received the [Grand Jury Prize](#) as well as the George Starks Spirit of Slamdance Award. We are so proud of all of our faculty and alumni filmmakers. For a complete list [click here](#). Be sure to keep an eye on all of these films as they continue to make waves in the coming year.

Theatre

Harrison David Rivers '09 received the [2018 Relentless Award](#) for his play *The Bandaged Place*. Administered by [The American Playwriting Foundation](#), "The Relentless Award, established in honor of Philip Seymour Hoffman and his pursuit of truth in the theater, is the largest annual cash prize in American theater awarded to a playwright in recognition of a new play." **Benita De Witt '16** is directing two shows in Sydney, Australia by School of the Arts alumni: *Razorhurst* by **Kate Mulley '16** at the Hayes Theater, and *Slaughterhouse* by **Anchuli Felicia King '18** at Belvoir. This fall, **Tyne Rafaeli '14** will be directing *The Coast Starlight* at the [La Jolla Playhouse](#). Last month, *Our Last Night on Earth* by **Stacie Dugan Vourakis '03** was performed at the Hudson Guild Theater. *No Candy* by **Emma Stanton '16** was performed last month at the Portland Playhouse.

Visual Arts

Matthew C. Wilson '13 participated in the International Film Festival Rotterdam with his film, *Within the Temple Without*. **Wang Xu '13** has a show, *Garden of Seasons*, at the Vincent Price Art Museum in Los Angeles that will be up until March 9. **Esteban Cabeza de Baca '14** was part of a group exhibition, *HOLD, RUN*, at the Gaa Gallery in Provincetown, Massachusetts. In Red Hook, **Maria Antelman '11** had a solo show, *Disassembler*, at *Pioneer works*, "which encourages radical thinking across disciplines by providing practitioners a space to work, tools to create, and a platform to exchange ideas that are free and open to all." Last week in DUMBO **Jessica Seagull '10**, **David Brooks '09**, and **Mark Dion** held their inaugural event at Union, "a meeting place to discuss ecological futures, extraction, economy, and trust."

Writing

Tracy K Smith '97, US Poet Laureate, received the [Harvard Arts Medal](#) and has also launched a daily poetry podcast series, *The Slowdown*. *All the Lives We Ever Lived* by **Katharine Smyth '10** was published by Penguin Random House and received a [starred review](#) from *Kirkus Reviews*. **Sam Ross '13**, selected by Carl Philips for the Levis Prize, has published his debut collection of poems, *Company*, with Four Way Books. **Alexandra Watson '15** will receive the [PEN/Nora Magid Award for Editing](#) for her stewardship of *Apogee*. **Jane Bernstein '77**, alumna and Professor of English at Carnegie Mellon University, has published *Gina From Siberia*, co-written with her daughter, Film alumna **Charlotte Glynn '13**.

To keep receiving news and updates, make sure we have your most recent contact information. If you know of a fellow alum who is not receiving emails from us but would like to, have them email us at artsalum@columbia.edu.

As always, please continue sharing your news and accomplishments with us via artsalum@columbia.edu, and like and follow our [Facebook](#) page. You can also keep an eye out for exciting new alumni achievements on our Twitter feed by following [@cusoaalumni](#).

Best,
Laila Maher
Dean, Student and Alumni Affairs

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

This edition of the Alumni Spotlight features Film alumnus **Leon Hendrix '15**. If you would like to submit your own stories to be included on our website, you can do so at this [link](#).



Writer-director Leon Hendrix was born and raised on the Southside of Chicago. An Academy of TV Arts and Sciences fellow, and Fox HBCU Media Alliance member, Leon studied at Columbia University School of the Arts where he developed his pilot, *Wake*. In 2015, Leon joined Film Independent's Project Involve as a writing fellow. Afterward he was awarded a spot in the Fox TV Writer's Intensive and, later he was named a Universal Pictures Emerging Writer's Fellow. Leon has developed stories with Levinson/Fontana, 2929 Productions, Fox, Universal and CBS. Leon writes dramas and genre stories that push new cultural perspectives into the mainstream. In his spare time, Leon works with "at-risk" youth and families with special needs, travels, and explores the outdoors.

His script *White Devils* made The Hit List and The Black List in 2017, before selling to WB/ Stage 13 with Leon attached to direct. Currently, Leon is writing a pilot for Gaumont, working on a

TV series for Universal Cable Productions, and writing a feature film adaptation for XYZ Films. His co-written pilot, *Spook*, is being optioned by David Ayer's Cedar Park and eOne.

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

There were a handful of amazing filmmakers/teachers who I had the pleasure of learning from. I'd have to highlight my work with my thesis adviser Dan Kleinman, and my television writing teacher Alan Kingsberg, as the most transformational and inspiring of my tenure there. Alan taught me everything I know about television. Before him, I hadn't considered a career in TV writing, but it was the moment when that was becoming a much more viable, fulfilling and experimental path for new writers in Hollywood. He showed me how to break television down and really made me into a TV nerd. I took his class about three times! Dan was the most supportive teacher I've ever had as a creative. He gave smart notes, and he was always there to read drafts. I was ambitious so that was a ton of work, but he kept me calm and was always ready with honest, progressive feedback. I was blessed to find both of those guys during my time at CU.

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

I would say that the School of the Arts taught me about the necessity of finding what I often refer to as your "jazz". We all love that first amazing album, that breakthrough work or role or painting or installation of an artist. Part of that is pent up creative energy. People spend years struggling to make a statement then finally something comes out and it feels vibrant. Alive. Defiant. Loud. That's your jazz. I learned as I struggled and failed to mimic other artists and fit into other traditions that I was never really myself. My jazz was that frustration and that schism. I learned to embrace the distance between me and the middle. Between my work and comfortable interpretation, and that I think is what makes me stand out. I know what's on the other side, I know what there is to love about the old standards...but the people I work with know I'm going to riff and scat and bring them something that's breathing and funky.

What were the first steps you took after graduating?

After I graduated I had plans to work for a non-profit as a film teacher, but the universe and the Lord above intervened. I had always applied for development programs and any opportunity to share my work or see my scripts entered in competition. I won a spot in a Film Independent fellowship, and followed it up with fellowships with Universal in feature film and Fox in television.

What advice would you give to recent graduates?

The best advice I ever got at CU was from Maureen Ryan. "Do work and get it out there." There is this sense that some folks are lucky. I have to say it was very fortunate to get three fellowships in a year, but for every person who gave me that backhanded compliment I smiled because I knew I

was outworking those people. Do small things well. Write when you hate it. Paint or act or dance when you think nobody cares. If you wait for validation it won't come. It takes a ton of focus. In my new professional space, I'm working on a half dozen things at once but few people are in on the process. There is patience and a delirious hope involved, and people don't know about half of the things I'm up to. It's a mind game and you have to make yourself stronger. Know that every person who says 'no' and every rejection you get is one step closer to your breakthrough. I believe we tend to see success, genius, and achievement as a binary. We either "are" or we "aren't". I believe that when you're really in the lab building something special, it sometimes feels no different than writing another flop. You may think you're crazy, but the reality is creation is a spark in a shadow. There's a ton of genius out there that may never be tapped because people don't have the heart to fail over and over. The truth is: nobody can make you a star. If you believe in your work, do it, show the world and let the audience call you a genius. And whether they do or don't... creators create.

ALUMNI BENEFITS

- +[Artists' Resource Center \(ARC\)](#)
 - +[Update Your Information](#)
 - +[Email Forwarding & CU Address](#)
 - +[Online Alumni Community](#)
 - +[CAA Arts Access](#)
 - +[Complete List of Benefits](#)
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