

Celebrating  
50 Years

Columbia  
University  
School  
of the Arts

# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER SPECIAL EDITION

## Alumni Benefits

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[CAA Arts Access](#)

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Dear School of the Arts Alumni:

We hope you're having a wonderful fall. Thesis season is beginning with performances of *Our Town* from November 11-21 at The East 13th Street Theater featuring the Acting Class of 2016. You can find more information and purchase tickets [here](#). Please also join us for Visual Arts Open Studios on Sunday, November 15, where you can see works in progress by our incredibly talented second year Visual Arts students. For more information about Open Studios, [click here](#).

We are happy to announce another School of the Arts - CAA Arts Access collaboration: a special night for Columbia alumni at *Invisible Thread* at Second Stage Theatre on Friday, November 20. After the show we will be joined by Director **Diane Paulus ('97 SOA)** and Associate Director **Shira Milikowsky ('07 SOA)** for an exclusive talk back. [Click here](#) to purchase tickets.

We will continue to celebrate our 50th Anniversary and all of you, our wonderful alumni, all year long. Please keep sending your memories about your time at the School of the Arts and people who influenced you through the [Alumni Stories Survey](#).

In this fifth special 50th Anniversary edition of the Alumni Newsletter, we share more on-campus history and profile alumni who graduated between 2005-2015.

As always, please email us at [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu) with any news you'd like

to share.

Best,

Laila Maher  
Associate Dean, Student and Alumni Affairs



*Opening of the LeRoy Neiman Center at the School of the Arts*

## **History of the Arts at Columbia**

### **1990-1991**

Creation of undergraduate majors in Visual Arts and Film Studies.

### **1991**

Film Division inaugurates the annual screenings of student films in Los Angeles, California.

### **1993**

Acting concentration reestablished in the Theatre Arts Division under director

Andrei Serban.

**1994**

The Program for Art on Film, an international clearinghouse for information about films and videos on art, formerly at the Mellon Center, becomes part of the School of the Arts as first component of a new Center for the Documentary formed through collaboration between the School of the Arts and the Graduate School of Journalism.

The Graduate Program in Visual Arts reinstated.

**1995**

Opening of Dodge Lobby Coffee Bar, the School's first communal space, to encourage interdisciplinary exchanges among students.

**1996**

Extensive renovation of Dodge Hall creates space for the LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies and for digital media, video, and writing labs.

LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies established, to offer innovative instruction and research in art of printmaking.

**1997**

The Undergraduate Writing Program is transferred from the School of General Studies to the School of the Arts Writing Program, under the direction of Professor Alan Ziegler.

## Pop Quiz

1. What is the title of Amy Koppelman's ('01) novel, which was turned into a screenplay and directed by Adam Salky ('08)?
2. Which Writing adjunct professor live-streamed his writing process while adapting Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*?
3. Which '02 Playwriting alumnus's work will be the most produced play in the U.S. during the 2015-2016 season?
4. Name the '13 Visual Arts alumna who was granted the 2015 Frieze Artist Award.

*Scroll down to the bottom of this email to check your answers!*

## Alumni Spotlight

This edition of the Alumni Spotlight features Dasha Shishkin ('06), Ito Aghayere ('12), Rachel Israel ('13), and Sara Nović ('14). If you would like to submit your own stories to be included on our [website](#) you can do so at [this link](#).



### Dasha Shishkin '06 Visual Arts

Born in Moscow, Russia, Dasha Shishkin currently lives and works in New York, NY. She received her MFA from Columbia University, New York, NY (2006) and her BFA from the New School for Social Research, New York, NY (2001). In 2013 Shishkin had a major solo exhibition, *erry icket*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara. Other recent solo exhibitions include *I Surrender, Dear* at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH; *SAMMY* at Galleria Giò Marconi, Milan, Italy; *BB5*, Grieffelkunst, Hamburg, Germany; and *Desparecido*, Zach

Feuer Gallery, New York, NY. Shishkin's group exhibitions include *One Torino: Shit and Die*, Palazzo Cavour, Torino, Italy; *Imaginary Portraits of Prince Igor*, at Gallery Met, New York, NY; *Gaiety is the Most Outstanding Feature of the Soviet Union: Art from Russia*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK; *Idealizing the Imaginary: Invention and Illusion in Contemporary Painting*, Oakland University Art Gallery, Rochester, MI; and *Embrace*, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO. Dasha Shishkin is represented by Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Culver City, CA. <https://www.vielmetter.com/artists/dasha-shishkin>

Above:

"saucy tricks for sticky sorts", 2014

Acrylic, Conte Crayon on canvas

77"H x 72" W (195.58 cm H x 182.88 cm W) unframed, 81.50" H x 76" W (207.01 cm H x 193.04 cm W) framed

Gallery Inventory #SHI171

Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

Photo: Robert Wedemeyer

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

Gandalf Gavan is a wonderful vivid memory for me from my Columbia years. He was a fantastic human being, super classmate and a remarkable artist!

I had first met him during the interview School of the Arts conducted for prospective students. Gandalf was one of the interviewing committee members (already a first year MFA student), handsome, cunning, completely intimidating.

Meeting him accidentally at an art opening a month or so after being accepted into the MFA program I encountered a generous good spirit, welcoming and encouraging.

Gandalf was truly curious about the world. His curriculum at Columbia probably included a class in every division. His work reflected that curiosity and was awe inspiring by its hunger for discovery and subtle and not so subtle beauty.

Not a specific incident sticks to mind but an overall sense of "love this guy!"

His work is true inspiration. [\*more\*](#)



## **Ito Aghayere '12 Theatre**

Ito Aghayere is a Nigerian, Canadian, American actress and former White House intern who was never the kind of kid who wanted to grow up to become a ballerina or the President of the United States. All she wanted was to be able to use her big mouth without getting in trouble for it. She has a C-SPAN addiction and bachelor's degree from Duke University in Political Science and Theatre Arts and a master's degree from [Columbia University](#).

She has appeared off-Broadway, on TV and in films such as "[Orange Is The New Black](#)" (directed by [Jodie Foster](#)), "[The Knick](#)" (directed by [Steven Soderbergh](#)), "[Unforgettable](#)," "[Forever](#)," upcoming independent film "[Right Song, Wrong Chord](#)" (2015 Release) and "Wet Behind The Ears" (Soho International Film Festival - Winner).

Recent off-Broadway credits include [The Liquid Plain](#) at [The Signature Theatre](#), [Three Days to See](#) at New York Theatre Workshop (Transport Group Theatre), [The Tempest](#), [Macbeth](#) and [Much Ado About Nothing](#) at Classic Stage Company, Midsummer Night's Dream at Classic Theatre of Harlem, [The Obeah Symphony](#) at The Billie Holiday Theatre, and [Vanya and Sonya and Masha and Spike](#) among others.

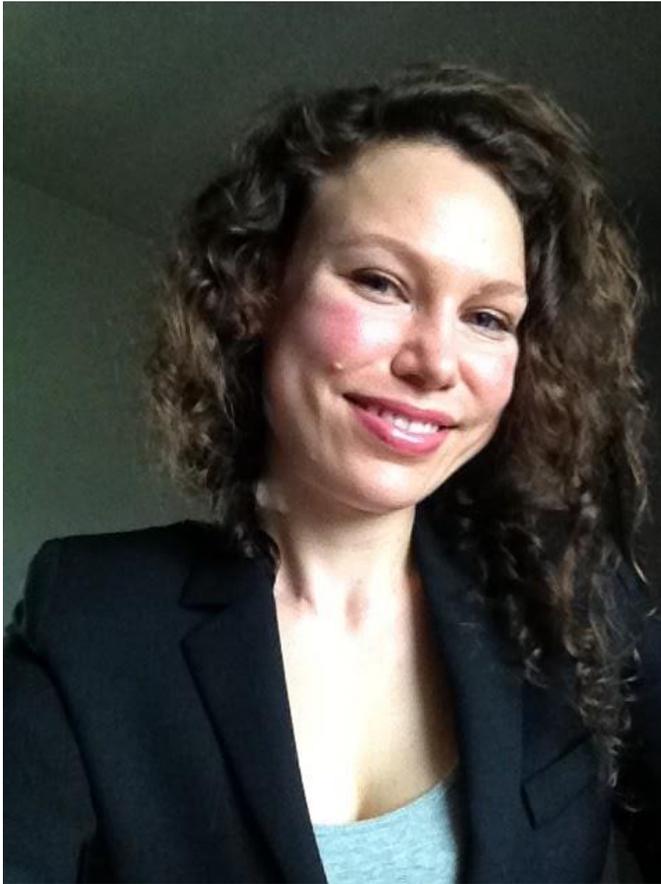
Ito will be starring in Danai Gurira's new play, *Familiar*, at [Playwrights Horizons](#) this February.

Website: [www.itoaghayere.com](http://www.itoaghayere.com)

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

I truly believe that the distinction of any program is determined by the presence of a dynamic faculty - the people at the heart of that beautiful exchange of ideas that takes place between student and teacher. Any school is really just a network of pretty buildings in the absence of a diverse and passionate group of people who can create and maintain an environment where students can learn, assess, and grow.

From day one, I was overwhelmed by the caliber and diversity of the men and women who made up the compelling cadre of professors, instructors and mentors within the School of the Arts MFA Acting program. As a Duke University graduate having focused my study on Political Science, Chinese and Theater Arts, I learned the value of cross pollination across disciplines and the importance of variety and competition in the marketplace of ideas. Continuing my education here at the School of the Arts, I was not to be disappointed with the myriad techniques, ideas and processes that my new professors encouraged me to test and explore. I can honestly say that my process as an artist was directly influenced by the amazing diversity of the faculty at the School of the Arts and the variety of methods, perspectives and approaches that I was exposed to as a student. [more](#)



**Rachel Israel  
'13 Film**

Writer / Director Rachel Israel is a NYC based filmmaker and an adjunct professor of film at Rhode Island School of Design. She received her BFA with Honors from RISD and her MFA in Film with Honors from Columbia University. Rachel has written and directed numerous short films and screened at festivals such as Slamdance and Florida Film Festival.

She was an Associate Producer on *Violet and Daisy* (2013) starring James Gandolfini and Saoirse Ronan. Her most recent short, *Keep the Change*, premiered in 2013 at the Columbia University Film Festival, where it won the Focus Features Best Film Award, the Alumni Best Film Award and the Arthur J. Harris Memorial Prize.

Rachel recently started post-production on her directing debut, the feature film version of *Keep the Change*, a narrative made in collaboration with a cast of actors on the autism spectrum.

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

My thesis advisor, Ramin Bahrani, was a tremendous inspiration. He taught me bravery through his inquisitive approach to filmmaking. I've learned to tackle new projects with faith, hoping that the answers I get along the way will surprise and challenge me.

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

The generosity of my fellow colleagues at the School of the Arts has had a profound impact on my development and joy as an artist. Two years after having graduated, the relationships I started at Columbia have only grown stronger and have multiplied to form a network of friends helping each other to take risks and make great work. I shot my first feature this past summer and worked with over a dozen CUSOA film graduates as key production members. [more](#)



**Sara Nović**  
**'14 Writing**

Sara's first novel, *Girl at War* (Random House), will be out in paperback March 2016. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Vice*, *The Guardian*, *The Believer*, *The LA Review of Books*, *Guernica*, *Electric Literature*, *The Agriculture Reader* and others. She is the fiction editor for *Blunderbuss Magazine* and the Spring 2015 Kim Frank Visiting Writer at Wesleyan University.

<http://sara-novic.com>.

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

My time at Columbia felt like a kind of homecoming--up until that point I had only met a few people who love books and writing as much as I do, and then suddenly

my life was full of them! For me that was really invaluable.

While I was at SOA I was working on my novel on and off, but Sam Lipsyte was a faculty member who had a big impact on the book's structure, even though I technically wasn't working on it in his class. After submitting a short story featuring some of the main characters that also appear in the novel, he was kind enough to let me bend his ear during office hours as I explained to him the bigger narrative, which I was struggling to structure. He drew out a squiggly map as I talked, and I walked out of there knowing exactly what I had to do next--a rare and magical moment for a writer!

Really though, the relationships I formed with my colleagues are the ones that continue to inspire and fortify me now that we're finished with the program. I got my agent on the recommendation of one of my friends, and I have another friend who is my "writing buddy" and holds me accountable for sitting down and doing the work. [more](#)

*All alumni are invited to tell us about your time at the School and its influence on your life as an artist. All spotlights will appear on our website, [arts.columbia.edu/soa50](https://arts.columbia.edu/soa50). Please note that there will be an editing process prior to publication. To submit your story for an Alumni Spotlight, [CLICK HERE](#).*

**POP QUIZ ANSWERS:**

1) [I Smile Back](#) 2) [Joshua Cohen](#) 3) [Ayad Akhtar, Disgraced](#) 4) [Rachel Rose](#)

Office of Alumni Affairs  
Columbia University School of the Arts  
[artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu)