

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

October 2018

Dear School of the Arts Alumni,

Last week we celebrated the life and work of beloved Professor of Poetry, **Lucie Brock-Broido ('82)**, in a tribute that included readings of her poems by friends, colleagues, and former students. In a testament to her impact on our community, among those reading were School of the Arts alumni **Mary Jo Bang ('98)**, **Sophie Cabot Black ('84)**, **Henri Cole ('82)**, **Emily Fragos ('96)**, **Harmony Holiday ('13)**, **Marie Howe ('83)**, **Tracy K. Smith ('97)**; current Writing Program professors **Timothy Donnelly ('98)**, **Dorothea Lasky**, and **Binnie Kirshenbaum**; as well as **Robert Polito**, **Srikanth Reddy**, and **Kevin Young**. You can read more about the tribute [here](#).

We are saddened to share that Writing alumna **Eleanor Levinson ('13)** passed away this September. **Victor LaValle ('98)**, Director of the Fiction Concentration, writes "Eleanor Levinson was a brilliantly imaginative writer and an invaluable member of the Columbia community who will be sorely missed." You can see her brilliant imagination at work in her stories "[The Threeway Marriage](#)," and "[Emily](#)."

This fall our alumni have had their work shown throughout the world. Take a moment to see what they've been up to.

FILM

Wajib, written & directed by **Annemarie Jacir ('02)**, will screen at the [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#) from October 5 - 11 as part of a retrospective series of her films. *Tel Aviv on Fire*, written & directed by **Sameh Zoabi ('05)**, co-written by School of the Arts Film Professor **Dan Kleinman**, won First Prize at the [Haifa Film Festival](#). *Crystal Swan*, co-written & directed by **Darya Zhuk ('15)**, was selected as Belarus's entry for the 2019 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It won the Grand Prix at the [Almaty Film Festival](#) in Kazakhstan last month, and last week it screened at the [Bergen International Film Festival](#) in Norway and the [Milano Film Festival](#) in Italy. *Youmeddine*, produced by **Dina Emam ('16)**, was selected as Egypt's entry for the 2019 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. *Youmeddine* was also selected for a [Cinema For Humanity Audience Award](#) at the El Guona Film Festival. The mission of the [El Gouna Film Festival](#), now in its second year, is to showcase a diverse selection of films for a passionate and knowledgeable audience and to foster better communication between different cultures through the art of filmmaking. Also at El Guona, *The Swing*, directed by **Cyril Aris ('17)**, won the [Bronze Star Award for Documentary Film](#). *Uniform*, directed by **Ellie Fombi ('17)** and written by Theatre alum **Jeffrey James Keyes ('10)**, will be shown this fall at Out on Film: Atlanta's LGBT Film Festival, the Buffalo International Film Festival, Gender Reel Twin Cities Film Festival, and in Germany at Pride Pictures Queer Film Festival Karlsruhe. **Fombi** was also selected for the [Artist Academy](#), by the Film Society of Lincoln Center, along with fellow alums **Barbara Cigarroa ('18)** and **Jordana Spiro ('15)**.

THEATRE

Jillian Walker's ('17) *Songs of Speculation*, [a solo performance](#) imagining the history of 1700s New Orleans at the intersection of sex, power, policy, economy, and race, will be at JACK in Brooklyn from November 1 - 3. **Carl Cofield ('14)** has been appointed [Associate Artistic Director](#) of The Classical Theatre of Harlem, and

will be directing *Twelfth Night* at Yale Repertory Theatre. Go to Hulu and watch [the new series](#), *The First*, created by **Beau Willimon ('03)**, the award-winning creator of *House of Cards*. **Jocelyn Bioh's ('08)** play *School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play* [will return to Off-Broadway](#) at the Lucille Lortel on October 16 with the same cast as its sold-out premiere production last spring (October 16-November 25). **Torrey Townsend ('13)** wrote *Night Workers*, [a new play](#) that was featured at the New Works Festival at Long Wharf Theatre. For those in Los Angeles, **Oliver Mayer's ('89)** new play, *Members Only* will be at [The Los Angeles Theatre Center](#) (October 25 - November 18).

VISUAL ARTS

Dana Lok ('15) has a [solo exhibition](#), *Mind's Mouth*, at Bianca D'Alessandro in Copenhagen. **Lok** was also recently awarded, along with **Adama Delphine Fawundu ('18)**, **Ektor Garcia ('16)**, **José Delgado Zúñiga ('17)**, and **Sara Stern ('17)**, a [2018 Emerging Artist Grant](#) by the The Rema Hort Mann Foundation. According to the Foundation, grantees were selected for “demonstrating critical and rigorous work in the field of contemporary art as well as an ability and commitment to making substantial contributions to the arts in the future.” **David Brooks ('09)** and **Allison Janae Hamilton ('17)**, along with mentor **Mark Dion**, have work in *Indicators: Artists on Climate Change*, an exhibition at [Storm King Art Center](#). The exhibition “explores the impacts of the changing climate in ways that incorporate scientific, cultural, and aesthetic perspectives.”

WRITING

Rachel Kushner ('01) was [shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize](#) for her novel *The Mars Room*. **Hannah Lillith Assadi ('13)** was named a “[5 under 35](#)” Honoree by the National Book Foundation for her novel *Sonora*, which also received the Rosenthal Family Foundation Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was a finalist for the PEN/ Robert W. Bingham Prize for Debut Fiction. **Rebecca Donner ('01)** has been awarded a [2018-2019 residential fellowship](#) at The Graduate Center at the City University of New York's (CUNY) Leon Levy Center for Biography. The fellowship includes full access to research facilities, writing space, and a \$72,000 grant. Donner will work on a biography of Mildred Harnack, an American literary scholar who was a leader of one of the largest anti-Nazi resistance groups in Germany. **Sigrid Nunez ('75)** was shortlisted for the National Book Award for her novel *The Friend*, as was **Diana Khoi Nguyen ('12)** for her poetry collection *Ghost Of*.

To keep receiving news and updates, make sure we have your most recent contact information. If you know 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 Acting alumna **Phumzile Sitole '16**. If you would like to submit your own stories to be included on our website, you can do so at this [link](#).

Phumzile Sitole is an actress and voice over artist from Johannesburg, South Africa with an MFA in acting from Columbia University School of the Arts. Recent theater work includes *Yellow Card*



Red Card at the New Ohio Theatre, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Othello* at Classic Stage Company, and *Macbeth* at The Connelly Theater. Her television credits include: *Orange Is The New Black*, *Elementary*, and *The Good Fight*. She played alongside Olivia Washington in the short film *LostFound*, which was selected for the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Phumzile participates on panels and gives readings and speeches with The Aspen Institute and The Public Theatre.

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

Wow, quite a few actually. I think it's really quite tricky to separate the impact that faculty vs peers had during my time at the School of Arts. Where there were days when my peers were as in the 'gutter' or excavation of the process as I was, I found solace in the words of Andrea Haring, who continuously made us believe that we were more than capable of being our best selves even in our exhaustion. She was a brilliant resource for channeling our everyday life struggles into our work in a healthy way while challenging us to take responsibility for how we bring ourselves into the room. Then there were days when I would look a year above me at someone like Marcel Spears. A peer of outstanding talent who brought himself into the school with the most overflowing generosity of everything anyone could need. He really showed me how to put myself aside for the benefit of another and how essentially that is a vital tool for acting as well. Learning to be selfless in your pursuit of relating to someone else. He still inspires me, with his ongoing success and influence on us all.

What advice would you give to recent graduates?

I would definitely advise recent graduates to trust themselves more than ever before. I think there is a tendency after graduation to feel like the carpet has been ripped from underneath you and your sense of self becomes a bit distorted. But to remember that the three years Columbia provided were just a collecting-of-tools and that you are the vessel that now has the liberty to use those tools however you please. The industry is ever changing in a really exciting way and it definitely won't be a walk in the park, but neither was grad school, so keep up that work ethic and you'll be okay.

ALUMNI BENEFITS

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

Columbia University School of the Arts
artsalum@columbia.edu

Office of Alumni Affairs
Columbia University
School of the Arts
305 Dodge Hall, MC 1808
2960 Broadway

New York, NY, 10027
email: artsalum@columbia.edu