

# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

## COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

October 2019

Dear School of the Arts Alumni:

I want to begin this month's newsletter by drawing your attention to an important university initiative. This year, Dean Carol Becker is spearheading the [Year of Water](#). For the next two semesters there will be art exhibits, concerts, lectures, and symposia focusing on the Earth's most precious resource in all of its social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental complexities. Watch [this video](#) with Dean Becker to learn more about what's to come. You can be proud of the School of the Arts for taking the lead on this initiative. All of the events will be open to the public. Information on specific happenings can be found [here](#) and below under Events.

We are making some adjustments to our social media channels to better connect with you and promote your work. Therefore, we're retiring our alumni [Twitter](#) account and focusing on the alumni [Facebook group](#) and [LinkedIn page](#), as well as the Artists' Resource Center [LinkedIn](#) page. In addition to our Facebook group, School of the Arts alumni news will still be shared via The School of the Arts [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts.

Below are some exciting updates from your fellow alums, followed by this month's Alumni Spotlight: **Farooq Ahmed '06**.

### FILM

Director and Co-Writer **Sean Dunn '17** and Co-Writer **Shakti Bhagchandani '18** screened their film *Kingdom Come* at the [La Biennale di Venezia](#). *Citizen K*, [a new documentary](#) associate produced by **Ophelia Harutyunyan '15**, also screened at the festival. Screenwriter **Karen Sztajnberg '06**'s newest feature film, *Variações*, had a [great debut](#). *Awake*, directed by **Mark Raso '12** and co-written with his brother **Joseph Raso '04**, is currently in [production for Netflix](#). **Chris Teague '06** won an Emmy for Outstanding Cinematography for the Netflix show *Russian Doll*. You can read an interview with Chris about the show [here](#). *Yellowjackets*, a series co-written by **Ashley Lyle '07**, will begin [production for Showtime](#) this Fall.

*Sister Aimee*, co-written and co-directed by **Samantha Buck '16** and **Marie Schlingmann '16**, is available on iTunes and other digital services. *Porno*, directed by **Keola Racela '15**, co-written and

co-produced by **Matt Black '15** and **Laurence Vannicelli '15**, and co-produced by **Sarah Seulki Oh '15**, will screen at the [Brooklyn Horror Film Festival](#) in October. In August, it had its European premiere at the FrightFest Film Festival. *Green*, written and directed by **Suzanne Andrews Correa '17** and written and produced by **Mustafa Kaymak '17** will screen at the Nashville Film Festival, Tacoma Film Festival, DC Shorts, 24FPS and AfterImage Film Festival. The film was edited by **Pinar Yorgancioglu '16**, assistant directed by **Nicolas Becerra '18** and **Fabio Montanari '16**, and line produced by **Mark Castillo '17**. **Emre Gulcan '17** served as the digital imaging technician, and **Bam Johnson '19** was a camera operator.

*Ava in the End*, directed and edited by **Ursula Ellis '17**, premiered at the Fantasia International Film Festival before screening at [FilmQuest](#), where it was nominated for Best Sci-Fi Short, Best Director, Best Actress, & Best VFX. It will be screening at Mill Valley next month. Ursula's short, *For George on His 30th Birthday* will also be screening at the [Lone Star Film Festival](#). *Baby* by **Thais Drassinower '17** received the Audience Award at the NALIP [Latino Media Fest](#) in Los Angeles. Her film [Memories of the Sea](#) was selected by KQED for their Film School Short series.

## THEATRE

**Kareem Fahmy '07** and **Melis Aker '18** will be featured at the [Middle Eastern American Writers Lab Launch](#) on October 7 and 8 at the Lark Theatre. **Ross Berger '01** has published a new book, [Dramatic Storytelling & Narrative Design: A Writer's Guide to Video Games and Media](#). **Karen Malpede '72**'s play [Other Than We](#) is a New York Times Critics' Pick for fall theater. It premieres at La MaMa Theater this November. **Tyne Rafaeli '14**'s new play *Power Strip* opened on October 5 at the [Lincoln Center Theater](#). **Rehana Lew Mirza '07** was selected as a [Playwriting/Screenwriting Fellow](#) at the New York Foundation for the Arts. **Kim Katzberg '09** won the 2019 New York Innovative Theatre Award for [Outstanding Solo Performance](#) for *Dad in a Box*.

This month there are a number of great collaborations between our Theatre alums. **Anna Jastrzembski '19**'s play [The Happy Garden of Life](#), produced by **Halla Tryggvadottir '19**, will be at The New Ohio Theatre October 18-27. **Benita de Wit '16** will direct **Anchuli Felicia King '18**'s play *Slaughterhouse* at [Belvoir St Theatre](#) in Sydney, October 16-November 2. **Kareem Fahmy '07** will direct **Clarence Coo '10**'s play [On That Day in Amsterdam](#) at Primary Stages October 29-December 18. **Dara Malina '15** will direct **Kate Mulley '16**'s play *Grey Lady* as part of Montclair State University's [New Works Initiative](#).

## VISUAL ARTS

**Rachel LaBine '19** was awarded a [Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant](#). **Nancy Cohen '84** has an exhibition at [Accola Griefen Gallery](#) in Brooklyn that opened September 23. Contact [info@accolagriefen.com](mailto:info@accolagriefen.com) to make an appointment to view the exhibition. **Suzanne Hodes '62** has a show at [Three Stones Gallery](#) in Concord, open through October 16. Alumna **Alexandra Lerman '12** currently has artwork in the [Museum of Hygiene](#) in Saint Petersburg, Russia, as

part of the ProArte Festival *Contemporary Art at the Traditional Museum*. **Jonah King '16** is part of a [large-scale exhibit](#), titled *Desire: A Revision from the 20th Century to the Digital Age*, currently at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin until March 2020. **Maria Antelman '11** currently has an exhibition titled *Mechanisms of Affection* on display at the [Visual Arts Center](#) at the University of Texas - Austin, until December 6. **Nadja Verena Marcin '10** performed her show *OPHELIA* at [Stadtgalerie](#) in Saarbrücken, Germany. **Steve Sas Schwartz '85** is in a new exhibition, *In These Woods*, at 719 DTLA Gallery.

## **WRITING**

**John James '11**, recipient of the Max Ritvo Poetry Prize, has released his collection *The Milk Hours*. Book tour events can be found [here](#). He is also reading with fellow alums **Julia Guez '11**, **Joseph Fasano '08**, and **Monica Ferrell '02** at [Book Culture](#) on October 11. Julia was also recently featured on the [Poetry Society of America](#) website for her poem "Still Life with Vicodin." The feature includes memories of and insights from working with **Lucie Brock-Broido '82**. **Cyrée Jarelle Johnson '19** released his debut collection of poetry, *Slingshot*, on September 17. **Terese Svoboda '78** will publish her nineteenth book, *Theatrix: Play Poems*, with Anhinga in 2021. She was featured on [Irish Radio](#) for her biography of poet Lola Ridge.

**Aaron Hamburger '01**, **Lauren Grodstein '01**, and faculty member **Joshua Furst** had a reading at KGB Bar as part of their Sunday Series. **Gnaomi Siemens '18** has been named a [2019 Travel Fellow](#) of the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA). **Jenessa Abrams '17** has [published](#) her short story "Griddlecakes, or the World Above Grief," with Platypus Press. **Johnny Greene '73** was [profiled](#) in the Oxford American. Johnny was an activist and writer in the New Journalist mode who died in 1990 from complications from AIDS. **Anna Rabinowitz '90** is having the [world premiere](#) of a multimedia performance based upon her book-length poem, *Darkling*, at Theater Wit in Chicago.

Please continue to send your updates to [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto: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

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## **ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**

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This edition of the Alumni Spotlight features Writing alumnus **Farooq Ahmed '06**. If you would like to submit your own stories to be included on our website, you can do so at this [link](#).

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Raised in the great state of Kansas, Farooq Ahmed is a graduate of the Columbia University Creative Writing Program and of Brown University, where he studied biochemistry. He is a Contributing Editor for *Photonics* magazine, and his writing has appeared in the *Financial Times*, *Nature*, and *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. His work has been lauded by the South Asian Journalists Association. He lives in Los Angeles. Find him on [Twitter](#) and IG: @farooqtheahmed.

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

Several professors contributed in innumerable ways to my writing and my understanding of literature. From Ben Marcus, I learned how to view and use language as a tool—how to wield it like a sculptor might a chisel. Binnie Kirshenbaum and Victoria Redel showed me how to construct scenes—literally sentence-by-sentence. Victor LaValle and Sam Lipsyte helped me understand world-building—how to add texture and conflict to the environments in which my characters lived. Together, these lessons continue to inform my writing.

**What were the most pressing social/political issues on the minds of the students when you were here?**

The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 happened a few weeks after my graduate school cohort started our MFAs. As one can imagine, it took time for us to regain a sense of normalcy. And many, including myself, questioned the art that we were making, and how best we could interact with the world.

As a brown-skinned Muslim man, it didn't take long for suspicion and scrutiny to find me. I lived in lower Manhattan at the time, and the NYPD and FBI investigated my apartment; members of the FDNY threatened my life; and fellow New Yorkers paid extra attention whenever I stepped onto the subway or into the airport.

So, it's fair to say that my perception of the world, as well as its perception of me, altered my writing in ways that took a very long time to comprehend. (Shout out to all those in workshop who suffered through some pretty bad attempts!)

I know many other artists of color who felt the same way at the time, confronting a new unease

that was hard to process. Eventually, I channeled a lot of those conflicting emotions into the main character of my recently released novel—envisioning him as a worst-case-scenario fabricated out of the perceptions of Muslim men.

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

One of the perks of attending art school was the opportunity to take courses outside of my division. And while I had memorable workshops and lectures in the writing division, some of my favorite classes were in the film school—particularly Andrew Sarris’ and James Schamus’ seminars. Learning about film from an esteemed critic and producer, respectively, also gave me another way to approach narrative. This has been helpful in writing fiction and in other projects like screenplays.

**What advice would you give to recent graduates?**

Perhaps because we had spent so much time together in the previous years, many of my graduate school friends and I lost touch after graduation. Slowly, however, we revived those friendships, and they have proven, both personally and professionally, to be one of the best resources that Columbia gave us.

So, I would say: Take time after school to completely break away from the academic cycle and environment. Cleanse yourself of it. Find your art again without the other voices, the workshops, and the critiques. And then, reconnect! Seek those folks who care about you and your work. The outside world will not always care about either, but your friends and colleagues will.

## **ALUMNI BENEFITS**

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- +[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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