

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

March 2023

GREETINGS FROM SOA'S NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF THE ARC & ALUMNI AFFAIRS

Dear School of the Arts Alumni,

My name is Jessica Pierson and I am the new Associate Director of the Artists' Resource Center and Alumni Affairs at Columbia University School of the Arts. I came on board in January and I am excited to get to know our diverse alumni community!

A little about me: I have a BFA in Musical Theatre and for 10 years I performed in various regional productions and wrote/performed my own work around New York City. In 2017, I came to Columbia to get a Master's degree in Human Rights Studies and I've been at Columbia ever since! I spent the last 3.5 years at Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute where I curated programming on topics related to human rights. I am very much interested in the intersection of the arts and social justice, and I am excited to return to working with artists again at SOA!

In the next few weeks, you will receive a survey from Alumni Affairs that we would be very grateful if you took the time to fill out. It will help us at SOA serve you better. You'll also find below a quick form for you to update us on your work. As always, you can email artsalum@columbia.edu to share updates and arc@columbia.edu to post opportunities. You can also connect with us on our various social media channels:

School of the Arts Alumni Fan Page (promoting alumni news and events)

School of the Arts Alumni Facebook Group (closed group for alumni-only discussion and sharing)

School of the Arts Alumni Twitter Feed (keep up with the latest SOA Alumni news)

ARC LinkedIn Group (for students, alumni, and faculty)

Feel free to reach out to me directly at jp3709@columbia.edu to chat about your career development, or to brainstorm alumni engagement ideas! I'm really grateful to have this opportunity to support this incredible community of artists.

More soon!

Jessica

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Do you have new creative works to share, a show opening, or a film release coming up? Perhaps you've won an award, been appointed to a board, or taken a new job?

LET US KNOW!

What kind of SOA programming would be most useful to you as an alum?

TAKE THE POLL!

ALUMNI NEWS

FILM



Donovan Tolledo '22 has been named one of thirty Project Involve Fellows as part of Film Independent's Artistic programs.



Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic '17 was nominated for Outstanding Directorial Achievement of a First-time Feature Film Director for her film *Murina*.



Sharper, a film co-written and co-produced by **Alessandro Tanaka '04** and **Brian Gatewood '04**, was released in select theaters and on Apple's streaming service.

THEATRE



Saheem Ali '07 directs *Fat Ham* starring **Marcel Spears '15** on Broadway starting March 21.



Jocelyn Bioh '08's *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* will have its World Premiere at MTC in the Fall of 2023.



Adam Marple '10 directs *The Earth Turns- A Sustainable Theatre Performance for COP27* at the Falaki Theatre in Tahrir Square Cairo March 15-18.

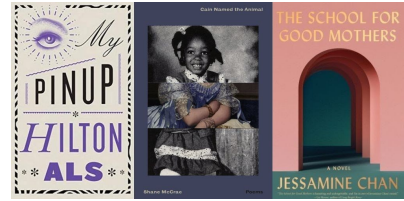
WRITING



The swailing, a debut poetry collection from alumnus **Patrick James Errington '15**, will be released this spring from McGill-Queen's University Press.

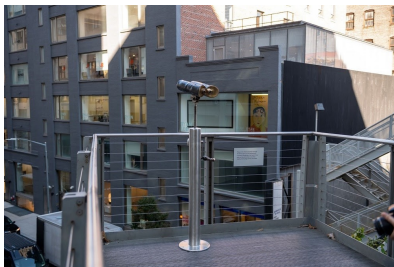


Anonymity Is Life, by alum **Sola Saar '19**, is among the finalists for The PEN/Hemingway Award. Novel Prize from Fitzcarraldo Editions, Giramondo and New Directions.



Jessamine Chan '12 has been nominated for the PEN/Hemingway Award.

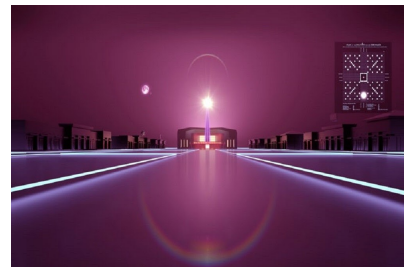
VISUAL ARTS + SOUND ART



Julia Phillips '15's exhibit *Observer, Observed* is at High Line Art until August 2023.



A Shapeshifter with a Heavenly Secret, a new exhibit by **Denisse Griselda Reyes '21**, runs until March 18th at White Columns gallery in New York.



Tali Keren '16's exhibition *UnCharting* runs at The James Gallery from March 9th-June 4th.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Sarah Smarsh '05 is a journalist who has covered politics and public policy for The New York Times, Harper's, The Atlantic, National Geographic, The New Yorker, and many other publications. Her first book, *Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth* (2018), was an instant New York Times bestseller, a finalist for the National Book Award, winner of the Chicago Tribune Literary Award, and a best-books-of-the-year selection by President Barack Obama. Smarsh's second book, *She Come By It Natural: Dolly Parton and the Women Who Lived Her Songs* (2020), was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

A first-generation college graduate raised on a small wheat farm in Kansas, Smarsh is a frequent media commentator on rural issues and socioeconomic class. She has been a featured speaker at the Aspen Ideas Festival, the Obama Foundation Summit, Sydney Opera House, the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Rural Summit, the Clinton School of Public Service, the Moth storytelling mainstage and the Senate Democrats Rural Summit.

Smarsh is a former writing professor who has served as a Shorenstein Fellow at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and a Pritzker Fellow at the University of Chicago Institute of Politics. She lives in rural Kansas.

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

In his writing workshop, nonfiction professor Richard Locke provided incredible insights about my thesis--wisdom about the craft, yes, but also uncanny observations about specific, real-life characters and settings--that remain with me almost two decades later. What sticks with me most, though, is not the intellectual brilliance for which Prof. Locke is known but the tone with which he assessed my work. As a first-generation college graduate only five years off my Kansas family's wheat farm when I arrived at Columbia, I was accustomed to classism toward my accent, my rough edges, and my stories of a socioeconomically marginalized community. Professor Locke neither condescended to nor made precious my socioeconomic identity. He treated my work, its themes, and its author with plain respect, allowing me to focus on the work that became my first book, Heartland.

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

Tuition protests were common during my years at Columbia. I recall a friend wearing a black-and-white cow costume and holding a sign suggesting the School of the Arts was a cash cow for the university's other departments. Responding to that climate from my specific vantage as a student from a low-income household, I attempted to create a student organization for first-generation college students. Perhaps because class was such an ill-articulated identity at the time, only a handful of students showed up and the project fizzled. I would go on to spend several years as university faculty elsewhere, and my service work focused on diversity--including diversity of class and place.

What were the first steps you took after graduating?

I moved back to Kansas, took a bartending job at a biker bar on Interstate 70, and kept working on my book.

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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Office of Alumni Affairs
Columbia University
School of the Arts