Vincent

A Journal of Art-in-Residence

2020



Millay Arts

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millayarts.org



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Welcome to Vincent 2020

Throughout 2020—as the pandemic raged, the election loomed, climate change threatened, protests exploded, and deadly tragedies stunned—we took solace in art. Art helped.

When Millay Arts reopened in June, artists arrived feeling both exhausted and eager. As they retreated into their studios, at least some of the constraints of the pandemic eased. Projects that demanded attention were focused on, projects imagined were begun, projects that needed to be completed were finished. In this period of isolation, we were finding ways to ignite that elusive spark of creativity together.

We are especially proud of our 2020 alumni for their persistence and dedication; we are especially proud of our 2020 supporters for their enduring faith. Art helps.

With heartfelt gratitude, thank you.

Monika Burczyk + Calliope Nicholas *Co-Directors, Millay Arts*

Katie Berta

[I if obvious to others]

Originially published in Cherry Tree, Washington College, 2021

```
I, if obvious to others—
                       I, absorbed in them—
Asking my mother,
                  as a child,
                            but why aren't I
you? Why am I—
                 stuck in this
                             body I seem
to be alone? I, if obvious
                        to others,
                                  absorbed
like water drops,
                 breaths,
                        light on skin,
food in belly, used.
I, if obvious to others—
                       I, available to them,
soul (or whatever),
                  up on the surface for
anyone to examine,
                   check against their
map of you,
            check against their—
what is the self
               if not hidden and rather
absorbed into-
                 what is the self?
Someone—amongst
                    others—
                            carried
around in the brain of you?
                           I, if
obvious to others. I—
```

[What is uncondescendingly mutual]

Originally published in Guesthouse, 2021

What is uncondescendingly mutual, rooted in freedom and, equally, care? To love each other, but never like children. The root being, never, an elision. How do I enter you the right way? Do I enter? The lust toward being consumed always beneath the genital feeling of nearness. The genital feeling of nearness moving you always toward. Looking toward you, an other, I want to feel your heat upon me, your imagination upon me. Wanting to move myself out of myself like a too-small house. Wanting to—Don't take from me, I might say, or—. Can I be uncondescendingly mutual? Rooted in freedom and, equally, care? Loving myself, but never like a child, us alike in that love, having that love in common, its quality and extent? Believing there is something I offer you that the world will only offer once? And bound to you by it? Bound by it to our mutuality. You bound by what you offer, but freely, mutually, like a mother, someone might say, but, really, altogether apart from one.

[I will not be absorbed]

Originally published in Guesthouse, 2021

I will not be absorbed. Having been dissolved into nothing, a pill beneath a tongue or light dissipating low across a plane of grass, feeling diffuse and less-than-real, feeling like the ghost of a ghost of a ghost, this body haunting the body of us, the body of our people, who make one body by conforming, feeling like I was just an arm, a leg, a finger, the nail on a finger, important, yes, but certainly amputatable, having been dissolved and feeling dissolved, I will not be absorbed any further, will not sink into the mire, the soup of bodies you've been cooking for me. For me, as in to make me a part of it. For me, as in making it my fate. Everything in the pot softens and flavors that which is also in the pot. Everything in the pot blurs into all one thing. I am one thing unto myself. I will not be absorbed, am not absorbable, my borders distinct, firm, fixed.

David B. Smith

Prototype 01, 2016

Artist-designed textile, polyester fill, thread

21" x 15" x 8"



David B. Smith

Mask 2, 2021

Artist designed textile, embroidery on wood support

34" x 26"



Jhani / JFK Randhawa

Bhog

for Azadeh Ahmadi

Seeing a woman on the way to sea as if I have watched that scene so many times, even though I have not.

I.

when it rains, sounds from the highway carry further through crow filled firs. two miles, ascending, traffic hits the house through water. i wake in the dark with the ricochet. the sun hasn't risen, i roam to a different room, and i light a candle. something moves beyond the dark passage of the window, the house-tall holly bush catching scent of a storm heading east from the pacific. sitting on the floor, i turn my computer on, adjust a remainder of delicate pink cloth over my head. the traditional thing.

the respectful thing. the thing i feel i need to do for my dadiji's zoom bhog, her transition into death this morning finally sung and punctuated by awkward camera angles, internet lag, chaur sahib switching above the holy book, my brother-cousin and my auntie bleating some words, rising from their kneeled spot on a cut of red carpet.

II.

my lines, the walk to the sea and back, come from thread suturing their names together across the stars. it comes from the hairs, and pores puckering against what prickles like cold, pressed tin cauterizing finger tips. i had a question, about how far the pioneer's aura stretches, which is a question about suffusion. against the intimacies smoked out in the awnings of cheap material construction against the hill and the film of fog, and the moss-draped fission dome, and the cranes reaching toward mountain ice, against my cells and their clotting.

the border city that drove out the transpacific revolutionaries, its migrant labor force, with sticks dipped in flame and with dogs. before the migrants, it was the salish speakers, who would not be moved. does the light stretch? it stretches, her arms tangled in gold and salt, another clerk's girl

descending from the steamship kilindini harbor's back-spray. i've been undulating since her passing, my breathing shallow, her son's bulk collapsing and ricocheting down the stairs. to depart the traces, the ruins—to insist our intimacies. this presence.

III.

i begin to feel sad for reasons that my dead grandmother might not have felt sad about: no women can facilitate gurdwara service, perform simran for a group gathered in a sacred place like this temple on the west london high street. i wanted to hear the sounds of women carrying my grandmother away on a sea of pearls, but she disliked so many women. to be a woman was to win at a game stacked against you already, your poverty accrued through colonial land divestment, your tongue's shape around another occupier's language, the deaths of your sisters by your uncle's hands—or the creeping threat of it, when the refugees would pass in caravan, winding a cord around the edges of villages. the game ensured that deliverance was sealed, not by your will, but by the gamblings of your brothers, gossip. then you left the fabric of your home to stand in a line in a distant cold country. pluck pluck pluck, not you. in many ways my grandmother was deeply tangled in this, until she decided to stop leaving her row house in the immigrant zone.

IV.

the waters and their theories, moving, unstuck from our bodies. i see my great uncle, dadiji's brother, crying. he and his younger brother are the last living of ten siblings, now that my grandmother has died. i owe him a call but am scared. i make prsad, butter, atta, peanut flour, toasted almonds, sugar and water. i have no jaggery, no ghee, no rose water. the wind picks up, and i can still hear automobiles carving through the cascades, a grey light moving across a dome of clouds.

where it's no longer about traces but presence, a theorist drops a petal. an unquantifiable steam and torque of a shovel, the sticken-ness of things. the matte sound of rust against wet clay against subducted agates. there is the arrival of a stranger and their quiet departure, leaving the body behind. i would call this residue the phenomenology of divining, or the squelching dug place not quite long enough for the rabbit corpse to fit comfortably into. another matte sound and the hovering above. where the petal falls, it is a tear chalky with calcium and the unsettling high frequency that wraps itself around only one ear. where the presence is, where bodies are, a world of habits which puts certain objects within their reach. we could call this history, and we could call this memory, and these histories might *surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface*. these reaches of memory might be visited upon our bodies, the woman said. who has trembled in defiance against the heat.

VI.

laughing slicks over my teeth, saliva gripping against winter's entrance. dewdrop world is the dewdrop world, the poet writes, and yet and yet. her name calls me in at dawn, the snow wilting down, the broad leaf trees groaning under the weight. your story of working to make the place upright in the bitter wind, my heartline forgetting the tearing shrug of holly under earthen waters. the calyx, the shoe, the death i am mourning. or is it her life i am mourning? or, as v says, the death of someone else crashes into one's mourning for one's own death. i don't know. but i know there is something there, in sitting, infirm, in the beauty of that failure. outside i make cords out of ice and snowfall, the dew tangled frozen into a net. the cords i take and braid across the yard, from the rabbit's two foot deep grave, to the front door. a world of suspended water, the ash of an ocean coming ashore. the wind is still.

Notes

1.

The poem "Bhog" is a tangled shape formed from correspondence with friend and artist Azadeh Ahmadi, via a durational epistolary practice facilitated by hannah rubin.

बेत, bhog or bhoga, in the Sikh tradition, is an observance of sorrow or joy that calls for the recitation of shabds and scripture from the Guru Granth Sahib, or the Sikh holy book, without break or pause. In the space of this poem, the bhog refers to a funeral ceremony, though it may also refer to a wedding, an anniversary, or an opening. In Punjabi, one of my ancestral languages, bhog holds a fluid and fervent erotics, especially when put into relief beside the dead; as a noun, bhog directly translates to *delight, rapture, joining*, and as a verb, bhog means *to undergo, to conclude*. The frame of the bhog, populated by holy scripture, marks, for practicing Sikhs, a journey through god's created universe and a return to god. Bhog is also a ceremonially blessed food offered in pooja during festivals to gods, particularly in the Hindu tradition.

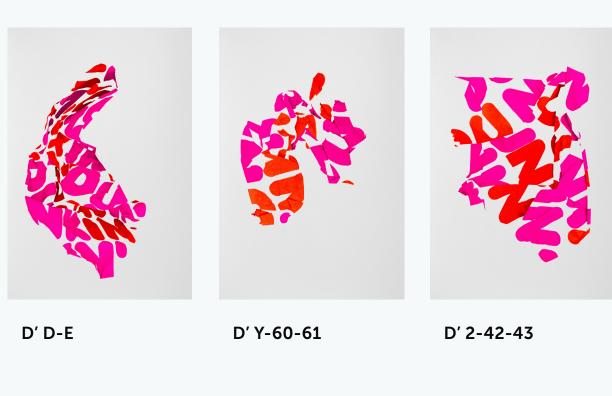
The epigraph, "Seeing a woman on the way to sea as if I have watched that scene so many times, even though I have not," is a line shared by Azadeh Ahmadi.

The phrase "surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface," is Sara Ahmed's, digested from her essay, "A phenomenology of whiteness," first published in 2007 in the journal *Feminist Theory*.

Charles Cohen

We are living in an open edition, 2020-2021

Archival pigment print 13" x 19"

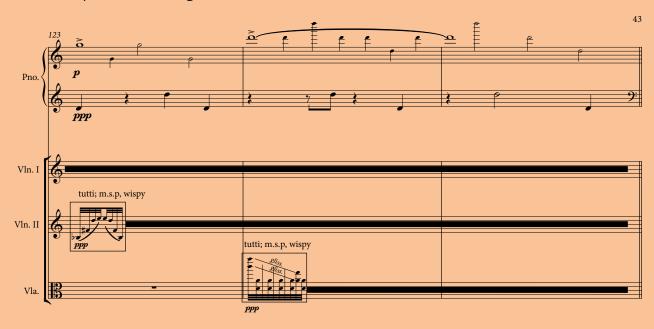


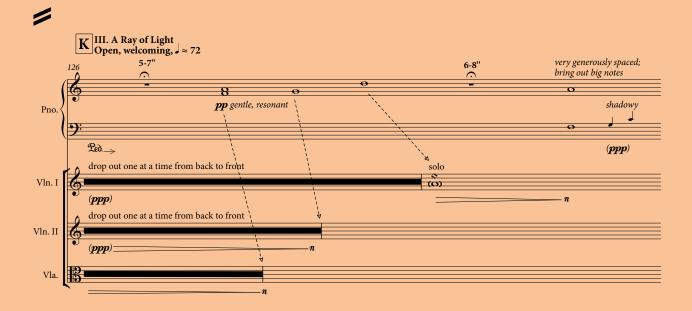


Bobby Ge

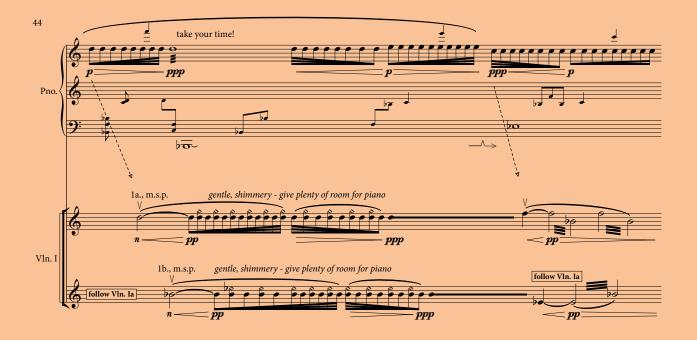
The Light That Breaks Through, 2020

Concerto for piano and strings



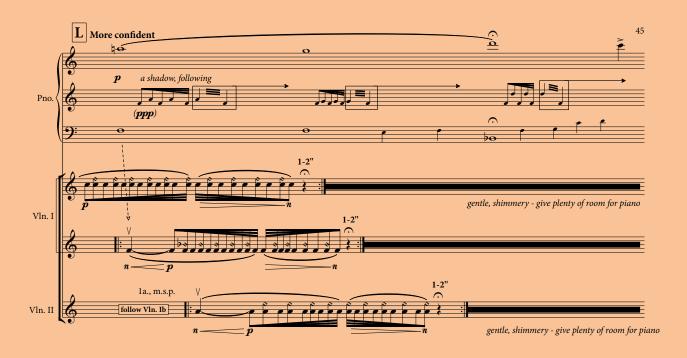






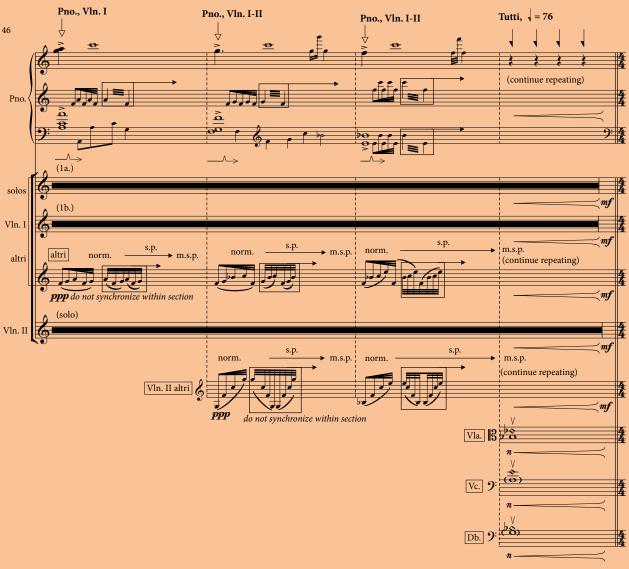


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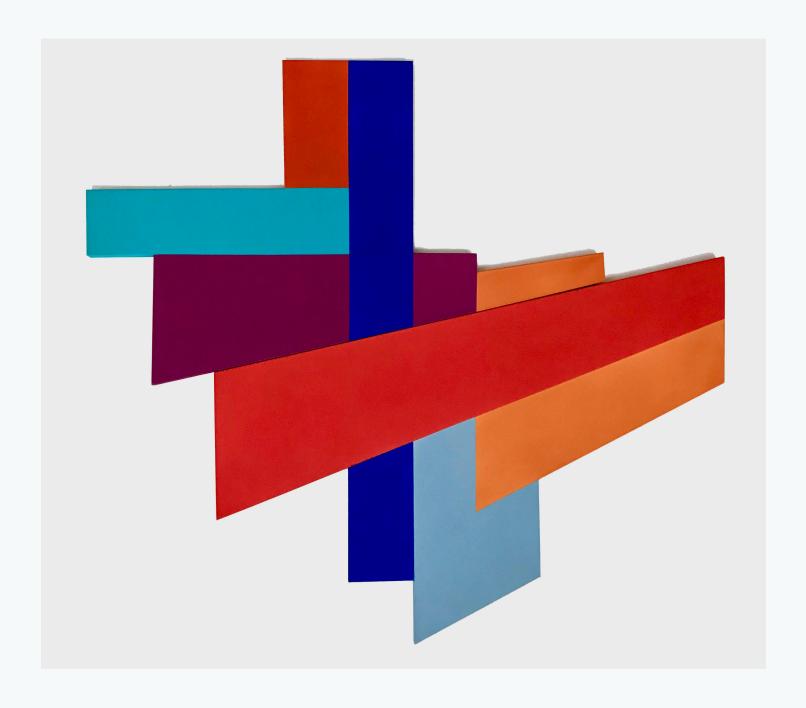


Mokha Laget

IMMINENT, 2021

2 panels, Pigment and acrylic polymer emulsion on shaped canvas

72" x 79"



A 10 year survey of Mokha Laget 's work will be featured at the American Art Museum's Katzen Center Washington DC, June 2022

Sabrina Fuchs Abrams

Recovering Nancy Boyd: The Secret, Subversive Humor of Edna St. Vincent Millay

Edna St. Vincent Millay embodies the spirit of the "New Woman" of Greenwich Village in the 1920s;¹ she is a free thinker and free lover known at once for her sharp wit and sexual candor as well as her feminine, youthful appeal. This duality presents a double bind for the modern woman writer, who is criticized for not being intellectual or serious enough while at the same time for being too forthright in her ideas and actions and not "feminine" enough. In order for a smart, sassy woman to be accepted, she had to mask her seemingly "masculine" aggressive, sexual and intellectual tendencies through the guise of female self-fashioning and through humor. While there is an ironic undertone to much of Millay's verse poetry, her satiric sketches under the assumed name of Nancy Boyd provided Millay an outlet for social critique through the popular and seemingly benign form of laughter.

Edna St. Vincent Millay was by all accounts the "It-Girl" of Greenwich Village in the 1920s. She embodied the sexual freedom, independent spirit, and sharp wit of the "New Woman", with her bobbed hair, youthful appeal, witty banter and sexual experimentation. Despite her literary success, Millay constantly had to negotiate her status as a woman writer in what was largely a male world of modernist writers. She did this in part by capitalizing on her feminine appearance and at times through the use of diminutive language in her personal correspondence while using irony, poetic form, and even assumed names to present a public persona and mask her more provocative ideas. For Millay, this fluidity of gender roles was defined from the outset of her career. In her early published poetry and in correspondence with her family, she used the name "Vincent," derived from her middle name "St. Vincent" after the hospital in New York where her uncle's life had been saved. This masculine nomenclature gave Millay the cover and the freedom with which to write with conviction and authenticity, and without regard to female gender expectations.

¹ Elizabeth Atkins, *Edna St. Vincent Millay and Her Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 70; Sandra M. Gilbert "Directions for Using the Empress': Millay's Supreme Fiction (s)" in *Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal*, ed. Diane P Freedman (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 170.

Like her counterparts Dorothy Parker and later Mary McCarthy, and as was common among successful women writers, Millay was the object of a cult of personality, valued as much for her embodiment of the "New Woman" as for her bon mots. This, as we shall see, proved somewhat problematic for the woman writer, who traded in part on her image in order to gain recognition but paid the price with her literary reputation or body of work, which in many ways seemed secondary to her physical body. This commodification of the "New Woman" in the age of advertising and popular magazines was as much a product of the times as of Millay's success, 2 and it was an experience on which Millay capitalized to a certain extent. The self-projected image of the whimsical, female poet also had its limitations (especially as Millay aged, took on more serious subject matter, and lost some of her flirty, feminine appeal), and Millay found ways to express a more serious, subversive side.

This ironic, subversive voice is most pronounced in Millay's satirical sketches under the pseudonym, Nancy Boyd. The assumption of a pen name can be seen as another form of performative identity or masquerading, through which the author can express less conventional or socially acceptable ideas through the double-voiced irony of humor. As Nancy Walker among others has observed, irony and satire are commonly used by women, minorities and other marginalized populations as a means of expressing subversive ideas in a socially acceptable manner.³ Sandra Gilbert notes that the name Nancy Boyd resembles the term "Nancy boy", an expression for an effete male and a possible play on gender duality.⁴

For Millay, an aspiring poet in the 1920s, the writing of fiction under an assumed name originated as a source of income. At the suggestion of W. Adolph Roberts, the editor of *Ainslee's*, a popular and somewhat sensationalized magazine, and her reputed lover, Millay began writing "potboilers" under the pseudonym Nancy Boyd from 1918 to 1921. Another male mentor and lover, Edmund Wilson, encouraged Millay to bring her talents over to the more respectable but still middlebrow

² See Catherine Keyser for discussion of modern magazine culture and the image of the "New Woman" in the 1920s. Catherine Keyser, *Playing Smart: New York Women Writers and Modern Magazine Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

³ Nancy Walker, *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert, "Directions for Using the Empress': Millay's Supreme Fiction(s)" in *Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal*, 180.

magazine, *Vanity Fair*, where he was an assistant editor and arranged for her to make a regular contribution of poetry in her own name and fiction under her pseudonym. But her light sketches were more than mere money makers as Millay seemed to take some pride and care in her work. In a 1919 letter to Arthur Davison Ficke, she says of her Nancy Boyd pieces, "they are beautifully written, after a flippant fashion",⁵ at once praising their merit and undermining their seriousness. Her satiric dialogues were a commercial success, and Millay was pleased enough with her writing to reprint selected sketches in 1924 as a book entitled *Distressing Dialogues*, to which she wrote an ironic preface in her own name, praising the humorous sketches of Nancy Boyd as "excellent small satires, from the pen of one in whose work I have a never-failing interest and delight."⁶

Distressing Dialogues mostly take the form of "dialogues", also termed sketches or "playlets", a dramatic form complete with stage direction, as well as some monologues and mock advice-column letters. The dialogue format allows for the use of an ironic, double voice and emphasizes the performative aspect of identity of the characters being played. The sketch or "skit" as early anthologizers of women's humor, Martha Bensley Bruère and Mary Ritter Beard referred to it in their 1934 anthology, Laughing Their Way: Women's Humor in America, is often set in a particular time and place and satirizes the manners and customs of the period. It can be in monologue or dialogue form, and because of its brief and witty style, was well suited to the magazines of the day, notably The New Yorker, Vanity Fair, Ainslee's and others.

Given the form and the venue, these sketches were often about and for sophisticated, urban elite who took pleasure in what appeared to be light-hearted self-parody. (The casual, inconsequential nature of the Nancy Boyd sketches was emphasized by their placement in *Vanity Fair* under the title of *Literary Hors D'Oeuvres*, implying a prelude to the more substantial main course). According to humor scholar Nancy Walker, male skits or "casuals" as they were referred to by *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross, tended to be "lighter, more frivolous in tone" and

⁵ Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, ed. Allan Ross Macdougall (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 94.

⁶ Nancy Boyd, Distressing Dialogues (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1924), vii.

⁷ Martha Bensley Bruère and Mary Ritter Beard, ed. *Laughing Their Way: Women's Humor in America*. New York: Macmillan, 1934.

comment on "manners, fads and affectations of urban culture" (read E.B. White, S.J. Perelman) while woman's skits were "more grounded in the realm of her everyday life" and "express in a more straightforward fashion an immediate discomfort with that life, usually arising from the speaker's experience as a woman."

As with Dorothy Parker's satiric sketches, the subject of most of Millay's sketches are male-female relations and the questioning of traditional gender roles and identities. Most are set among an urban, sophisticated elite, some specifically in Greenwich Village bohemia, among artists and would-be bohemians. Through parody and satire, Millay takes on social expectations of the female artist and the balancing of artistic and sexual freedom with the conventions of female subordination, feminine appeal, and domesticity. While at times invoking female stereotypes, Millay uses humor as a form of social critique to defy and expose the limitations of traditional gender roles and expectations.

⁸ Nancy Walker, A Very Serious Thing, 54.

Eli Nixon

Bloodtide

A proposal for a new holiday in homage to horseshoe crabs with an illustrated manual for activating it in a multitude of forms

These images from a section on tick checking as a holiday practice

Forthcoming from The 3rd Thing Press, Fall 2021





blood return (top)

self check (left)

check your friends (bottom)



Pen and paper
Size of a small hand



About the Artists



SABRINA FUCHS ABRAMS is Professor of English at the State University of New York, Empire State College. She received her Ph.D. from Columbia University and her B.A. from Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges in English. She is the author of Mary McCarthy: Gender, Politics and the Postwar Intellectual and editor of Transgressive Humor of American Women Writers and Literature of New York. She is founder and chair of the Mary McCarthy Society and Book Review Editor of Studies in American Humor. She received an NEH grant to pursue work on her current book project, The Politics of Humor: New York Women of Wit.

KATIE BERTA is the Managing Editor of The Iowa Review. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Kenyon Review Online, Prairie Schooner, The Iowa Review, Massachusetts Review, Blackbird, The Rumpus, Sixth Finch, and Green Mountains Review, among other magazines. You can find her book reviews in American Poetry Review, West Branch, Harvard Review, Ploughshares, and elsewhere. She has received fellowships from the Vermont Studio Center and the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing and an Iowa Review Award. She has her PhD in poetry from Ohio University.





CHARLES COHEN participated in the Core Fellowship at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston after earning an MFA in photography from the Rhode Island School of Design and a BA in anthropology from the University of Chicago. Exhibition venues include Jack Shainman Gallery, The School; Zwirner & Wirth; Julie Saul Gallery and Wild Palms, Düsseldorf. Publications include "Digital Art" by Paul, "CURVE: The Female Nude Now" by Dailey et al, and "Art/Porn: A History of Seeing and Touching" by Dennis. Collections include Fogg Art Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Portland Art Museum; Fitchburg Art Museum; and Steven Nelson, National Gallery of Art.

charlescohenart.com



BOBBY GE is a Chinese-American composer and avid collaborator who seeks to create vivid emotional journeys that navigate boundaries between genre and medium. He has created multimedia projects with painters collective Art10Baltimore, the Space Telescope Science Institute, the Baltimore Rock Opera Society, the Scattered Players Theater Company, and writer/poet Jenny C. Lares. His works have been performed across four continents by groups including the Albany Symphony's Dogs of Desire, Harbin Symphony Orchestra, Music from Copland House, the Bergamot Quartet, the Concerto Chamber Orchestra, Pique Collective, the Future Symphony Competition Orchestra, and the Atlantic Music Festival Orchestra. Ge holds a master's degree from the Peabody Conservatory, where he studied with Kevin Puts and Harold Meltzer.

As a New Mexico-based painter known for her geometric abstractions on shaped canvas, MOKHA LAGET takes hard-edge color field imagery into another dimension. Her work has been exhibited internationally over the past 30 years and has been featured in Art in America, The New Art Examiner, The Washington Post, among others. In addition to her painting practice, she has worked as an independent curator, art restorer, arts writer and was a Curatorial Assistant for the New Mexico Museum of Fine Arts. Her work is included in the collections of the Ulrich Museum, The Harnett Museum, The Museum of Geometric and Madi Art, Art in Embassies, The National Institutes of Health as well as private and corporate collections around the world. She lives and works in an off-grid studio in the mountains of New Mexico.





ELI NIXON builds portals and gives guided tours to places that don't yet exist. They are a settler-descended transqueer clown, a cardboard constructionist, and a maker of plays, puppets, parades and low-tech public spectaculah. Eli collaborates with artists, activists, schools, mental health and recovery centers, libraries and the more-than-human world. They are a Rhode Islander living on Narragansett and Wampanoag land. www.elinixon.com



JHANI / JFK RANDHAWA is a queer* Kenyan-Punjabi/
Anglo-American maker living in unceded Kumeyaay territory
in southern California. Exploring disruption, hybridities,
imperialism, dreams, and human entanglements with the
nonhuman, J's work has appeared or is forthcoming in Soap
Ear, Figure 1, Loves Me Zine, O BOD, DoubleBlind Magazine,
PRISM international, baest journal, TAGVVERK, and LA VAGUE,
and in venues such as The Mortuary, Thymele Arts, El Cid,
and the Woolen Mill Gallery. J is the recipient of a Yasmin
Fellowship from the Millay Colony for the Arts and was
a finalist for the 2021 PEN Emerging Voices Fellowship.
With Teo Rivera-Dundas, J is co-founder and co-editor of
experimental art and print project, rivulet.

DAVID B. SMITH was awarded a NYSCA/ NYFA Fellowship in craft/sculpture, an Apex Art International Fellowship, and residencies at Franconia Sculpture Park, Marble House Project, Textile Arts Center, Socrates Sculpture Park, Alfred University, and BOFFO. He was included in the 2019 Textile Biennial at Museum Rijswijk, The Netherlands, and Another World: The Textile Art of David B. Smith was exhibited at Millersville University and SUNY Old Westbury in 2020/21. His recent show, Same but Different, at David B. Smith Gallery in Denver, CO, was accompanied by a compilation of texts by writers from his Millay cohort, Ayeh Bandeh-Ahmadi, Katie Berta, and Svetlana Kitto.



Our Other 2020 Residents

Ayeh Bandeh-Ahmad, Anna Cabe, Sue Dean, Nadia Liz Estela, Nicki Gonzales, Wally Gunn, Melissa Hacker, Michael Harrison, Alicia Herrmann, Spencer Huffman, Svetlana Kitto, Shayan Lotfi, Byron MacWilliams, Emi Makabe, Sarah Thankam Mathews, Tom Nazziola, Jay Parabue, Nicole Pasulka, Johanna Povirk-Znoy, Elizabeth Riley, Tricia Romano, Kyle Sanna, Abigail Savitch-Lew, Emperatriz Ung, and Basia Winograd

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Millay Arts supports the work and creative process of multidisciplinary artists through residencies, educational and cultural programs that enrich lives and communities locally and globally.

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