



# Barnswallow

**WINTER 2021 / SPRING 2022**



Greetings from almost-Spring at Steepletop! Lots of news on the hill, including visits from a curious bear and hungry coyote, much to the delight of our March residents.

2022 started with a bang as we welcomed 60 participants to our Wintertide Rustic Retreat, the most we have ever hosted. And yes, we already have reservations for 2023 rolling in...

In February, we learned that Millay Arts—with the expert help from the architecture firm of Lacey, Thaler, Reilly & Wilson of Albany—was awarded a \$200,000 matching grant to make

essential renovations to both the Barn and Main House. The work begins as of July 1st and we look forward to sharing repairs and updates!

As always, we are forging new partnerships to help ensure a rich diversity and are very excited to welcome the winner of [Restless Books'](#) Immigrant Writing Prize for 2022, the Albanian-born poet and translator [Ani Gjika](#) this Summer; her book *By Its Right Name* will be published in 2023.

Our alums continue to shine: [Autumn Knight](#) (2018, Visual Arts), [Melissa Febos](#) (2022, Nonfiction) and [Ladee Hubbard](#) (2019, Fiction) were recently named [Guggenheim Fellows](#); Melissa's brilliant [Girlhood](#) also garnered a [National Book Critics Circle Award](#). We are also over the moon proud of our handful of alums who were short-listed for the very competitive [Creative Capital Grant](#) as recently announced: [Esperanza Cortez](#), (visual arts juror), [Lisa B. Thompson](#) (playwrighting), [Yanyi](#) (poetry) and [Claire Luchette](#) (Fiction). (Thinking this is another moment to remind alums that we provide free grantwriting assistance/editing as well as very low % fiscal agency fees!)

Planning for a series of year-long events to celebrate our momentous 50th Anniversary has begun in earnest with an Alumni Reunion at Steepletop slated for Friday, July 29th through Sunday, July 31st, 2023. Saturday will feature a sit-down dinner and special alumni entertainment! **MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

If you'd like to be a part of the planning for the reunion, please let us know! Alternatively, our new BIPOC Alumni Advisory Board Committee is being finalized (first Zoom meeting set for June) and we'd love to have your participation on that important new networking initiative as well.

A reminder to visit our website too, featuring bi-monthly blogs ([Happenings](#)) as well as announcements for Workshops and other [Events](#)! Alumni -- keep those updates as to book launches, readings, premieres, concerts, awards, exhibitions -- coming!

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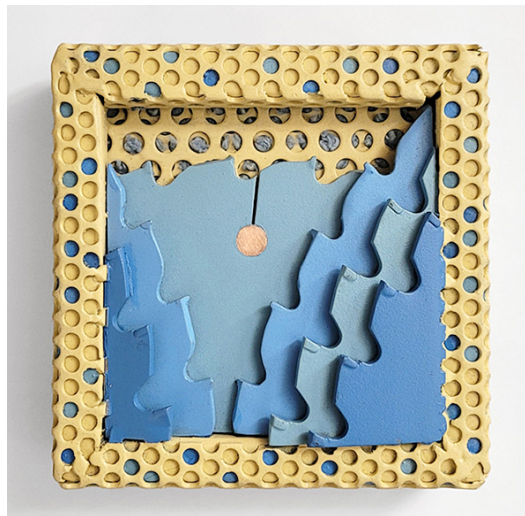
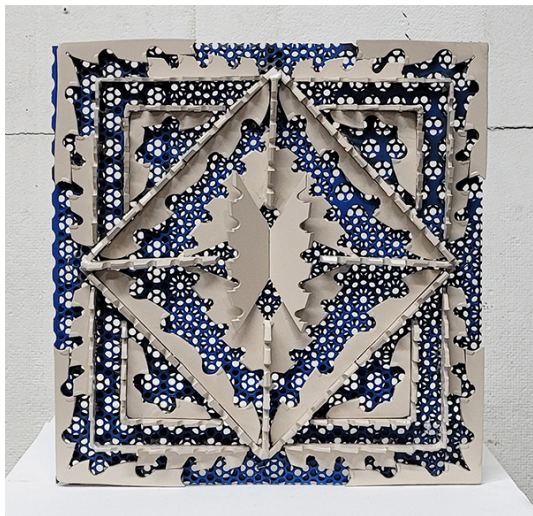
## Welcome Jackie Branson!



At Millay, our alumni are like family. After departure, we offer ongoing professional development assistance (free of charge!), provide paid Teaching Artist opportunities in our Hudson City Schools "Poetry in Translation" arts-enrichment program, offer honoraria for serving on a jury, and also host alums for work/trade during during the Wintertide Rustic Retreat. We also like to HIRE them!

Looking for a part-time Facilities Manager, we needed someone who had an intimate understanding of the needs and wants of our artists-in-residence, who could also wield a mean hammer, wasn't afraid of the squirrels in the Barn, is an Instagram pro, was thrilled to do the occasional run to Hudson for pick ups/drop offs, could build custom-designed furniture (Studio Har on [etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com)) AND had experience with building renovations. As

a 2013 resident, Jackie arrived at Millay Arts straight from a two-month residency at Sculpture Space in Utica; in subsequent years, she also served as a Visual Arts juror and has been a generous donor to our annual silent auction.



Jackie describes her experiences of Millay as "unique and enriching," and states that "Millay is an intimate residency, offering a beautifully tranquil space for the creative process. It has been an incredible experience to be a part of the Millay community getting to know the work of other creatives and having a common bond over our dedication to our craft. I believe there is an overwhelming sense of support at Millay thanks to its thoughtful simplicity, helping each resident get the most out of their time there. I am so pleased to be a part of the team and love spending time at Steepletop each week."

[learn more >>](#)

Ig [@jsbranson](#)

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## Leanna Primiani

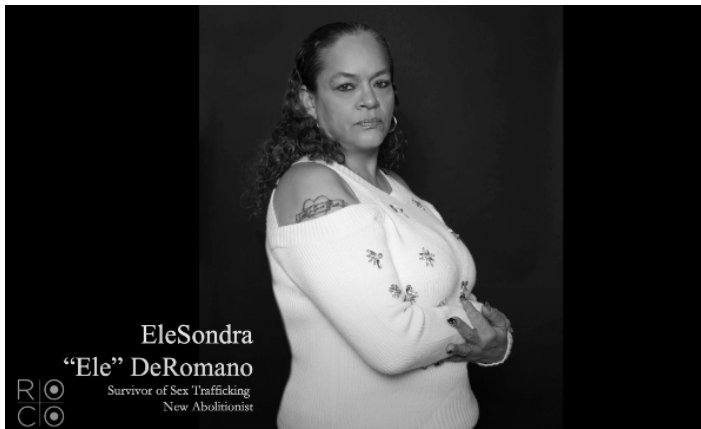
**NEITHER MEN NOR MONEY JUSTIFY MY WORTH**



Commissioned by the League of American Orchestras with the generous support of the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, *Neither Men Nor Money Justify My Worth* received its world premiere with RICO in Houston, Texas in February. A 2021 Composing alumna, Leanna wrote the majority of the 9-minute work during her time at Millay Arts.

Through *Neither Men Nor Money Justify My Worth*, I musically explore the life of a child victim of human trafficking. It is intended to be a musical commentary based on Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* programmed concurrently. The motivic material of the work is based on the harmonic and motivic elements from Mussorgsky original. The imagery inspiration for the work is taken from the portraiture of *The New Abolitionists*—people who are working to end modern slavery and human trafficking.

I first heard the term 'human trafficking' when working for the United Nations on their *50 for Freedom* campaign, and later when working with the Los Angeles- based charity *Everychild*. I was shocked to discover just how prevalent and close to home this issue is in our current society. According to UNICEF, in 2021 over 160 million children around the world are in some kind of forced labor, up from 40 million in 2017. Children between the ages of five to 11 now account for just over half of the total global figure. This means 1 in 10 children worldwide are trafficked.



The United States is not immune from this tragedy. In Texas, for example, there were over 300,000 human trafficking cases in 2016, with 80,000 of those being minors.

When taken into account with the numbers from UNICEF, it is difficult to fathom how trafficking has increased. I'm glad Texas had the courage to publish these statistics. My home state of California does not make its numbers public.

My background as a conductor informs my creative process, which is centered around the perception of how time unfolds. I'm particularly drawn to the concept of the Fibonacci sequence and the Golden Ratio ( $\phi$ ) - building the overarching musical structure on the scaffold of time rather than on the number of notes or measures, which parallels to our heroine's experience, measuring her existence in weeks and years.

The music in the first part of the piece is low and foreboding, shadowing the desperation of our heroine's journey. As the music inches towards the climactic point at the Golden Ratio, a ray of hope bursts through and propels us towards a brilliant conclusion when our heroine breaks free from the chains that have been constricting her since childhood.

In many ways, humans have an intense vulnerability, and that vulnerability is available for exploitation, especially in the young. When we think of ourselves as Americans, living in an informed, advanced, culturally enlightened society where there is hope for equality, to know that this type of unspeakable cruelty can persist is mind-boggling. The idea that people can partake, and be subjected to, practices of slavery can only be described as barbaric. It is my most sincere hope, and the hope of ROCO, that *Men Nor Money* will shed the tiniest bit of light on the hidden epidemic of human trafficking in the US. It is the ultimate injustice.

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## Winding Paths

## ALUMNI INTERVIEWS

We have noticed that many of our residents come to their creative professional life via surprising and circuitous routes. So of course we asked a few about their paths to living the creative life.

### Sahar Romani

**POETRY, ALUMNI 2020**



Poetry's been a steadfast companion. Since college, I read poems regularly, carried a notebook everywhere I went to jot down observations and images, but I wrote poems sparingly—every now and then, and only for myself or loved ones and friends. Before I started writing poetry seriously and more publicly, I took some beautiful detours into other forms of expression and meaning-making: I worked as a social worker and art educator in Seattle and Calcutta in my 20s;

I studied and participated academic modes of inquiry and writing during my 30s and trained as an ethnographer, first through a master's program in International Studies/South Asian Studies and then through a PhD program in Human Geography.

After my PhD, when it was time for me to start writing an academic book, I started to question whether I really wanted to continue a path of social science scholarship. Did I want to spend my weekends writing academic prose? At the same time, I started taking community-based poetry workshops for writers at wonderful organizations such as Cave Canem and the 92Y. I slowly realized that if I could write a book in my life, I didn't want it to be an academic book, but a book of poetry. After much reflection and self-reckoning, I

decided to bow out of social science academics and plunge into poetry: I started writing regularly and rigorously (one summer, I wrote a poem a week and mailed them as postcards to friends). A teacher of mine, the poet Rigoberto Gonzales, encouraged me to apply to an MFA program as a way to get institutional support to write full time, experiment with my voice, and study craft. Stars aligned and I was accepted to an MFA.

I'm currently putting together my first book; the collection so far plays with queerness and kinship, questions about the Divine, odes to Bollywood, meditations on ethnography and research.

## Highlights from My Time at Millay Arts

- Morning runs on the gravel path
- Tarot readings with fellow residents our last week together
- Ang bonfires + the night sky during the Perseid Meteor Shower

Listen to Sahar read

["When No One Else Watches" >>](#)

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## Stacy Nathaniel Jackson

**FICTION, OCTOBER 2021**

I retired from a twenty-five-year career in finance in 2019 after receiving my MBA from UC Berkeley – which was a quickly conceived back-up plan. Without much financial support or the confidence in my ideas as an MFA candidate in sculpture at the University of Arizona, I let go of plan A to be an academic and working artist in

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my twenties. Truthfully, I credit my gender transition to reclaiming a career as an artist, specifically a writer.

As a Sagittarius (fire) born on the cusp of Capricorn (earth) who transitioned in my late forties, I was also determined to reclaim the twelve-year-old writer in hiding who literally got in trouble for writing a racy speculative story in Catholic school.

Trouble here is defined as an after-school meeting with the principal, home room teacher, and my parents. My father had to leave work early for the dramatic hazing. In my adolescent mind, writing (at least what I wanted to write) wasn't safe.

After a corporate layoff, I jumped at the opportunity to jump back in, and get my MFA, this time in creative writing at San Francisco State. As an older artist recommitted to a full-time writing career, I value an unflinching personal investment in storytelling that I refuse to give up the second time around.

My current project is a hybrid speculative novel entitled *Surfacing*. Set in the future, Xandria Baldwin, a Black archivist at an esteemed cultural institution struggles with brain fog and long-hauler memory loss while documenting the undersea city-state of Islay. After a museum protest turns violent, her AI Telehealth assistant exposes its true nature attempting to keep her safe.



The novel is subversive in form and tone, addressing a Black future, a reimagining of climate and spatial justice, as well as a future possibility of reckoning with racial health disparities in the presence of AI bias due to machine-learned racism and sexism.

Originally conceived and inspired by Derek Walcott's eight-thousand-line epic poem *Omeros*, the work began fifteen years ago as a graduate student studying poetic long form with Paul Hoover. Returning and committing to the project in March 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I found a strict poetic "container" limiting; and a story within a story emerged.



I am inspired by Betye Saar, who I had the pleasure of meeting a few years ago at a garden party, she continues to work every day at the age of 95. Betye has been described as a visual storyteller known for assemblage and prints addressing dreams, family, cosmology, myth, stereotypes, race, and gender.

In whatever creative form I employ, *I look to Betye as a model for staying power in her craft and the commitment to her ideas, "breaking through" again and again.*

My best advice is to "keep on keeping on."

## Highlights from My Time at Millay Arts

- The spirit of those who worked in the Barn studio before me, left offerings included an altar and notes of encouragement (including my favorite "*Beloved, you can do this!*" (THANKS EIRIN!))
- The opportunity and willingness for six strangers to eat dinner together same time, same place and create community while respecting each other's processes and practice. *Wine and board games go a long way...*
- Deer ticks (are not small moles that need to be extracted from your skin, but a barn mate was willing to examine without laughing in my face)

[Learn more >>](#)

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## Narcissister

**VISUAL + PERFORMANCE ART,  
AUGUST 2021**



I have known since I was a young child that my calling was to be an artist and I expressed these desires to my parents. Growing up in La Jolla, CA I regularly found myself as the only kid in art classes with much older undergraduate and graduate students at UC San Diego where my father was a professor of physics. During junior and high school, I enrolled in resident summer art programs at Parsons School of Design in Los Angeles. During my first weeks as an undergraduate at Brown University, I discovered a passion for modern dance.

Upon graduating from Brown (BA, Afro-American Studies, 1993), I moved to New York City to continue my studies of dance as a scholarship student at Alvin Ailey American Dance Center. After a year of study at Ailey, I began to dance professionally in the US and Europe while continuing to also develop myself as a visual artist.

After 7 years of dancing professionally, I stopped due to injuries and concentrated my energies fully on visual art and supported myself financially as a commercial artist. I worked as a freelance window display and showroom designer for many other established retailers, and as an art director for photographers, including artist Lyle Ashton Harris.

In 2007 I began moving away from commercial art and started relying exclusively on my own art opportunities for financial support. To this end, I focused on taking my visual art practice in a direction that would encapsulate my various talents and interests and set me apart from the pack: the [Narcissister](#) project. Wearing a trademark mask and merkin, Narcissister was created to be multidisciplinary- to work at the intersection of performance and visual art, theatre, film, video, sculpture, collage, experimental music, and activism. I find being this Narcissister character to be so rich and fulfilling, I have committed myself to embodying her until my death.

Right now, I am finishing new Narcissister live performance works I started during the shutdown. I am making a book of my collage works with Eureka!, a small press in Kingston, NY, and I am working on my next feature-length hybrid performance / art doc about the improbable opportunity I had to quarantine in 2020 with art dealer Jeffrey Deitch in his LA home, the former home of closeted movie star Cary Grant.

I am inspired by the work of Yoko Ono: her multidisciplinary practice and the resulting diverse works of the highest caliber, her activism, and overall the longevity of her working career.

Best advice to young artists is to learn to cultivate and to enjoy an inexpensive lifestyle in order to have more peace and stability when the inevitable fluctuations in opportunities and cash flow arise.



## Highlights from My Time at Millay Arts

- Peering out my studio window during the beautiful summer rainstorms
- Nightly impromptu meditation sessions with my fellow residents
- Swimming in Lake Queechy!

[Learn more >>](#)

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## Savage Beauty / Millay Lab

**COLGATE UNIVERSITY + MILLAY ARTS: CREATING A SEARCHABLE DIGITAL ARCHIVE OF OUR 3,000 ALUMNI!**

The 50th Anniversary Committee has been assembled (although we would never turn down anyone who wishes to get involved) and plans are coming together for a series of events throughout 2023, in NYC, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chatham and Hudson.



Because we want to be as inclusive as possible, we were pleased as punch when the opportunity came to partner with [Professor Georgia Frank's \*God, Sexuality and Religion\*](#) course at [Colgate University](#). With an idea to include a public humanities element for interested students, Professor Frank dreamed up the "Savage Beauty Squad/Millay Lab."

Over the course of the Spring semester, 14 students went through boxes and boxes of paper file folders filled with alumni information to create a searchable database, complete with websites and updated contact information, accessible to all as an add-on to our website. Students were astonished by the sheer number of alumni (3000 and counting!) as well as their awe-inspiring talents.

As the External Affairs Manager, Monika met with the class each week to answer questions and provide background information; the semester wrap-up included a Brown

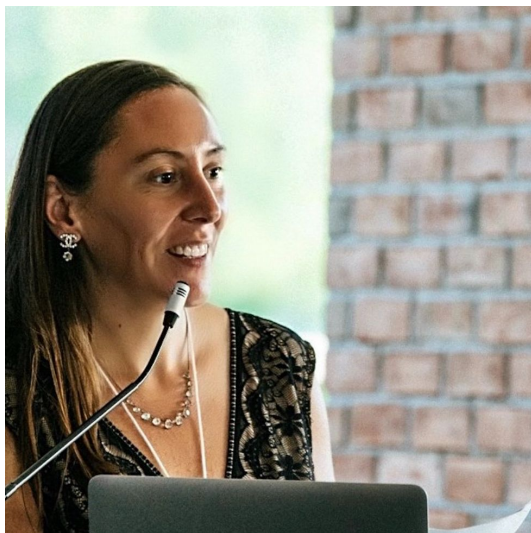
Bag Luncheon hosted by Colgate's [Max Shackni Center for Outreach, Volunteerism & Education](#), with a presentation by the students who shared their experiences and insights into the world of artist residencies. If Professor Frank has her way, Colgate's talented and curious students will continue to provide archival assistance this Fall, and we couldn't be more grateful!

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## Perfecting the Manuscript, Publishing the Book:

**A WRITING WORKSHOP FOR POETS WITH KRISTINA MARIE  
DARLING**

This [writing workshop](#) will provide detailed feedback on individual poems, as well as offering students a variety of strategies for sequencing, structuring, sectioning, and titling a full-length poetry manuscript. We will glean insights about these elements of craft from a wide range of published collections, which include Julianna Baggott's *Lizzie Borden in Love*, Lucie Brock Broido's *The Master Letters*, Shane McCrae's *In the Language of My Captor*, Ruth Ellen Kocher's *Domina Un/blued*, Krisin Bock's *Cloisters*, Jen Moore's *The Veronica Maneuver*, Jennifer S. Cheng's *House A*, and other texts as determined by student interests.



We will discuss the steps one takes to build an audience for a book prior to publication, strategies for effective pitches to publishers, and standard submissions procedures within the industry, in addition to offering personally tailored journal and publisher recommendations.

\$750 (includes all meals, private bedrooms)

[Register today >>](#)

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# Coming Soon!

## ALUMNI HAPPENINGS + VINCENT 2021



Stay tuned for Alumni Happenings, a special feature celebrating our alums recent successes, current projects, and upcoming events...

And—*VINCENT 2021: A Journal of Art in Residence*—also coming soon! Prepare to be amazed and delighted, as always!

In the meantime, check out

[Previous issues of Vincent >>](#)

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**VISIT OUR BLOG!**

**CONTRIBUTE NOW!**

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