



# Happenings

SEPTEMBER 2024



Greetings,

It's been a bit of a whirlwind year so far and hard to believe it's SEPTEMBER. As Summer winds down and Autumn descends -- with chilly mornings, brightly colored leaves, hungry bears and the last of the garden's bounty -- we look forward to welcoming the last of this

season's talented poets, writers, filmmakers, playwrights, composers, visual and performance artists to Steepletop.

We send this out in part to announce the launch of our new, custom-designed [website](#). (A supremely generous in-kind contribution from our very own graphic/web designer/Queen, Board officer Abigail Tovell, of [T-Square Design](#), based down the road in Housatonic, Massachusetts.) This amazing resource includes our first-ever [Alumni Database](#), a searchable archive of @3000 former residents. (As this section, and the site, are still being updated, if you are an alumni reading this, feel free to send us updated information/image - [email](#) any questions/comments.) Needless to add: **a thousand thanks** to Abby, as well as the tireless efforts of [Professor Georgia Frank's](#) Colgate students (who, over 2-1/2 semesters, transformed our paper files into an online database).

We would also be remiss not to express our gratitude again for the \$50,000 grant from the [Helen Frankenthaler Foundation's Climate Initiative](#): installation of heat pump equipment and solar panels to power our historic Barn start soon, to be completed before the snow starts to fall. This prestigious, visionary and highly-sought after support will allow us to continue to host -- in warmth and comfort -- residents for our popular off-season [Wintertide Rustic Retreat](#). (Reserve your space now -- [EMAIL](#) for application.)

This *Barnswallow* celebrates a common thread in our Artists-in-Residence comments about their time on the hill: the deep and lasting friendships formed while working alone together, that often blossom into professional collaborations as well.

As always, our alumni (and current residents) are our superpower: we are honored to be involved in their impressive careers post-departure. (For highlights of our 2023 season, be sure to click below to browse the latest issue of *Vincent: A Journal of Art-in-Residence*.)

In closing, wishing all a good start to the almost-upon-us holiday season. (Of course, if you feel like getting ahead of the End-of-Year appeals, your contributions are always welcome.)

And stay tuned for details of our (upcoming early December) NYC Holiday Cocktail Party Fundraiser!

Happy Halloween!

*Monika Burczyk*

Monika Burczyk, PhD  
Co-Director & Manager of External Affairs

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**Vincent 2023**

**A JOURNAL OF ART-IN-RESIDENCE**

Image Credit: Kevin Ford,  
*Folded Hands*, 2024

# Vincent

## A Journal of Art-in-Residence

2023

|                     |                   |                      |
|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Kay Ulanday Barrett | Helen Glazer      | Neil Daigle Orians   |
| Edmondson Cole      | Katiy Heath       | Christophe Preissing |
| Robin Croft         | Tobi Kassim       | Jane Sangerman       |
| Ann Burke Daly      | Gary Krist        | Gnaomi Siemens       |
| Tielin Ding         | MaryKate Maher    | Andy Šlemenda        |
| Rosemarie Fiore     | Claire McConaughy | Gigi (Geeta) Tewari  |
| Kevin Ford          | Paul Novak        |                      |
| Julia Forrest       |                   |                      |



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### FEATURING WORK BY

Kay Ulanday Barrett, Edmondson Cole, Robin Croft, Ann Burke Daly, Tielin Ding, Rosemarie Fiore, Kevin Ford, Julia Forrest, Helen Glazer, Katiy Heath, Tobi Kassim, Gary Krist, MaryKate Maher, Claire McConaughy, Paul Novak, Neil Daigle Orians, Christophe Preissing, Jane Sangerman, Gnaomi Siemens, Andy Šlemenda, and Gigi (Geeta) Tewari.

### Guest Editor + Designer

[Emji Saint Spero](#)

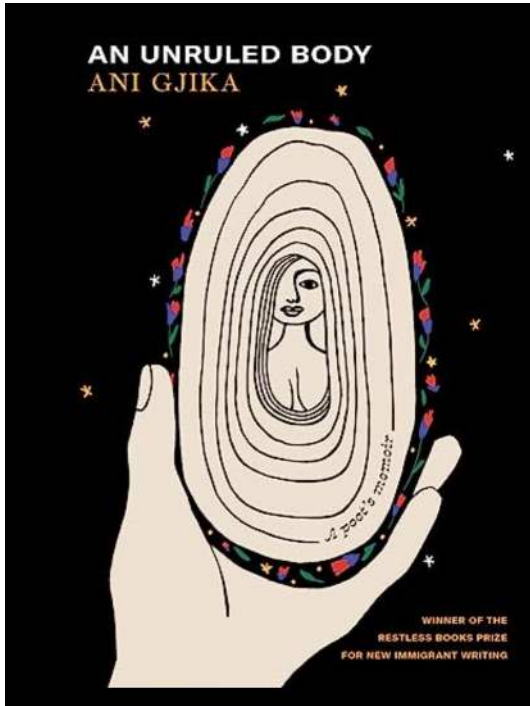
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# Collaborations / Connections

INTERVIEWS WITH ALUMNI

Ani Gjika + Jung Hae Chae

NONFICTION 2023 + POETRY JULY 2023



**Tell me a bit about your time at Millay. As two of the three writers here that month, did you share particular conversations about craft or inspiration?**

**ANI GJIKA:** I couldn't have asked for a better cohort—everyone was humble, charming, full of stories, generous with their time and quite handy and creative on weekends at making delicious meals together. During the day, we all disappeared into our own rooms and studios, hard at work, and in the evenings, sharing our creative processes and experiences, challenges and rewards with our own craft over a meal helped us bond immediately and strengthened those bonds. I remember staying up late a few nights talking to Jung Hae in her room, or in the shared dining room, about our works in progress and these writers lives we lead filled with so many hours of so many other responsibilities. You can feel alone within your own creative practice at times, but when you share with someone else who's going through similar choices and decisions, it opens up space for you to imagine something better for yourself, you sort of reawaken to push yourself harder. The push I'm talking about is inspiration. You feel inspired and sparked by this other person. Jung Hae has done that for me. We also had opportunities to travel together to see artwork or spend an afternoon at The Mount: Edith Wharton's home. When we place ourselves in a new setting, we see this other side of ourselves we hadn't noticed before. It was fun to see this joyful, carefree side of ourselves at The Mount, all four of us who went (Sarah, Jung Hae, Xime and I)—we made memories there we won't forget!

**JUNG HAE CHAE:** Yes, true, absolutely true, what Ani said about the cohort and the collective experience we had together, back in July 2022. I immediately felt a bond like no other with this cozy group of artists and writers. It was strange...as an introvert and an intensely private person, I don't immediately settle in with strangers, but I did with our bunch. We established a level of intimacy early on, I think, because we made each other laugh a lot, I remember, and because we had to fend for ourselves, figure out who's going to fire up the grill, chop up the onions and the garlic, dress the salad, set the table, and so on. And pick out which wine -- the WINE, of course! -- to go with our fabulous meals each night! And of course, there was the bear sighting (that's a whole other story!) I tell you, by the end, I really developed a special kind of feeling for each of these humans...I didn't want to say good-bye!!!

And I have to confess—I was immediately drawn to Ani. It was her shock of authenticity, something so warm and genuine about her. She knew how to let her guard down in a most lovely way. Everybody loved her. There was one evening, I remember, after one of our famous communal dinners, when it was just the two of us left at the table. Ani and I started talking and we talked and talked...about everything...we touched on whole swaths from our lives, details from each others' lives not easily shareable in a single sitting... we talked and we cried and we hugged, kind of not wanting to stop. What was so strange, almost uncanny, is how our lives overlapped in so many places -- big themes! -- how we both learned to speak and read and write in English (and translate, too, for Ani), this adopted language that became a language of love and self-love, of discovery and self-discovery; how we both grew up inside a religious sect that no one's ever heard of; how we both came from a line of strong women of mythological proportions, whom we have come to honor and model after, especially our grandmothers--Ani's and mine. It was an enchanted evening of deep conversation.

## So how did your interview in *The Rumpus* come about?

**AG:** We both attended the AWP Conference in Seattle in 2023, along with Monika, one of the Co-Directors. One of the days there, we were walking by all the booths at the bookfair and came across *The Rumpus* booth. We introduced ourselves—I think we were both so cheerful like typical fans when we met Senior Editor of Interviews, Annelies Zijderveld—and we asked if we could pitch an interview, *I Had a Whole Ocean in My Hands*, together for the Rumpus when one or both our books came out. Mine was coming out later that fall so later that year, I reached out to Annelies and pitched her and she gave us the opportunity to do the interview. But it was really Jung Hae who put in so much time to read, reread the book, talk to me, then form the questions and further go through edits after Annelies and another editor, Janet Rodriguez, looked through our interview.

**JHC:** Like Ani said, we met Annelies at the Rumpus booth at the 2023 AWP. My memory tells me she was the one who suggested we do an interview together, since both of our books were coming out in a similar timeframe. She really took liking to us, I think. :) We put her advice in the back of our pocket, and Ani ended up pitching Annelies near the release date of her gorgeous debut memoir, *An Unruled Body*. Once I got hold of the pdf version of this work, I printed it out in sections, and read it feverishly, savoring and studying every line, taking tiny little notes only I could decipher. I hadn't done author interviews before, so I think I took this assignment really seriously and went about it like I was studying for a PhD dissertation, which, in the end, turned out to be a great exercise for me, and for us, too, I think. The conversations we were engaging in—about our process, inspiration, and craft—were really a prelude to other opportunities that would come later, such as the author conversation we ended up having at the famed *Politics & Prose* bookstore in Washington D.C.! We also went on to propose a 5-person panel for the 2025 AWP conference on intersecting themes our works address. I envision our writerly friendship continuing as my own debut work nears publication.

## Did getting to know one another over a month-long stay add any elements to the interview process?

**AG:** I would say that Jung Hae's writing, voice, background as a fellow immigrant—all these things about her really speak to me and move me. I knew that doing the interview with her I could open up about anything she asked, I trust her as a person and as a creative being and respect her deeply. She gave so much attention and patience to the process of the interview. She was a great listener, reading between the lines so that the next question expanded upon a previous one. I was lucky for this attention and care she showed me and my work. This is who she is, you sense this in every sentence she writes, rendered so uniquely her own.

**JHC:** I'm so touched to hear Ani say that she trusts me as a creative spirit, that she trusts my sensibilities. This is the best you could hope for in a literary partnership. I went into this task of interviewing as a curious reader, first and foremost, but also as someone who shares so much of our background as a fellow immigrant and poet/writer of diasporic heritage. I was deeply curious about her process, and how her mind worked, from where and whom her literary ancestors hailed. I think it took a kind of deep listening on both of

our ends -- of deep sensing and tuning into each others' words, and of reading between the lines, indeed, transpired by the respect we have for one another as writers and as spirits -- to rise to this occasion to our highest. I'm so grateful to have had this experience of conducting my first-ever author interview with Ani, who has become a truly great friend.

### **What was your favorite part of the interview process?**

**AG:** I felt held by the complete trust of a friend and vice versa throughout. This feeling is priceless. This woman gave her all to the interview the way I felt I had given my all in writing my book. This interview was a gift and it wouldn't have happened if we hadn't met at Millay!

**JHC:** For me, I always enjoy engaging in close reading and parsing out what I'm reading as a way to study my favorite writers' works. What made this time so special is that I got to engage deeply with the work of my dear friend, Ani, whom I admire both as a human being and as a writer, poet, and translator. It was especially meaningful for me to have the chance to study this memoir up close and personal--this excavation of memory that resonated with me on so many levels--of this special person whom I have come to learn both on the page and in real life. Our close friendship added a special dimension to the experience of reading her words, and thinking and talking about them.

### **What are you working on now?**

**AG:** I just finished an intense teaching year while also promoting the launch of my memoir and translating a novel so I'm mainly unplugging this summer to rest and recharge. But the one thing I'm jumping in on later this summer is the audio recording of my book, in my own voice. I'm doing that this summer and hopefully the audiobook of *An Unruled Body* will be available later this year.

**JHC:** Wow, that is amazing and awesome that you were able to accomplish so much on top of your teaching, Ani! I have been working at a snail's pace, still trying to finish my manuscript of memoir-in-essays, *Pojangmacha People*, which won the Graywolf Nonfiction Prize (published in *Ploughshares* originally). Sometimes I find that switching between prose and poetry modes helps me get out of my funk, so I have been writing some new poems and also unearthing old poems that have been all but forgotten, trying to breathe new life into them. I'll be spending the summer, wrapping up the final draft of my book manuscript, which has been with me my whole life. It's time to finish it.

### **Any other news to share?**

**AG:** I was at Millay in July of 2022. Since then, the manuscript I was editing while at Millay was published in November 2023 and alongside it, several other interviews, excerpts, reviews. I'm grateful that the book has been so well received and welcomed by such diverse readers in the US, and abroad, particularly in Albania. It received an Honorable Mention in the Autobiography/Memoir category for the 2023 **Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Award** and is currently on the nonfiction longlist for a Massachusetts Book Award. I published a poem, *A Different Origin* in August 2023. Mostly, the past year, I've been busy

giving book readings at various bookstores and at other literary communities in several states in the US.

**JHC:** Completely amazing! So many congratulations on all that you were able to accomplish this past year, Ani! Huge congratulations on winning the Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Award!!!

I've been more on the down low, quietly working to finish my book. As a parent-writer, too, it's always bit of a challenge. That said, since Millay, I've completed two more residencies and am happy to get away for one more residency this July and August. On the publishing side of things, I've had three poems and two prose pieces published in a variety of journals. Although these will not be part of my upcoming book, that's ok because let's hope there will be more books coming down the pike!

[Learn more at Ani Gjika's website>>](#)

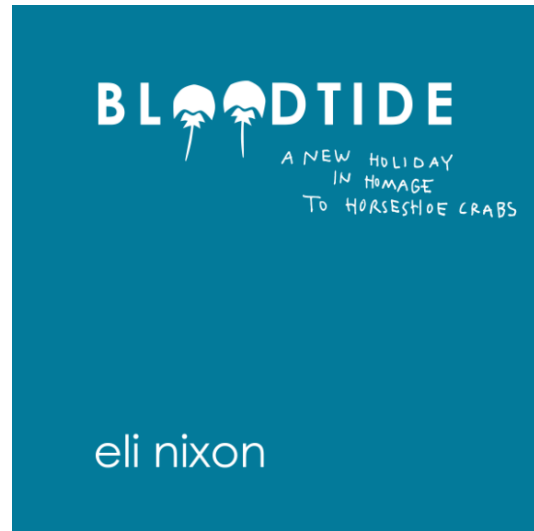
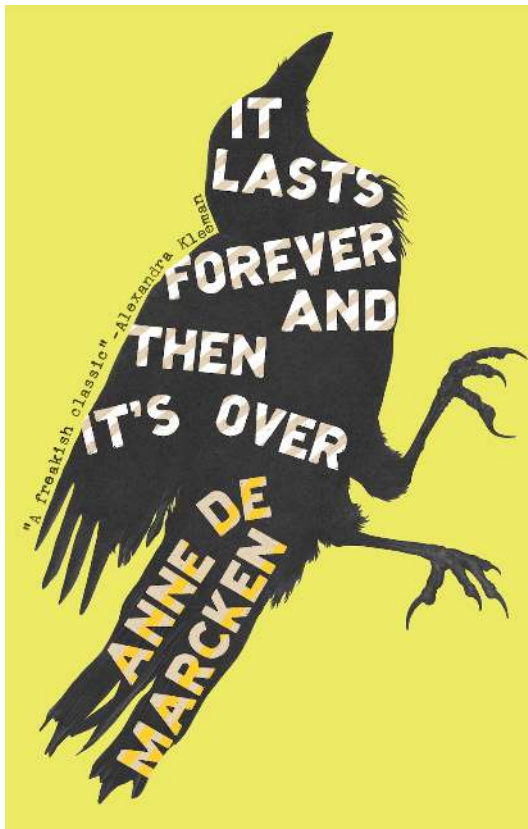
[Learn more at Jung Hae Chae's Instagram>>](#)

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## Anne de Marcken + Eli Nixon

**FICTION 2017 + THEATER 2022**





### Tell me a bit about what you each were working on while in residence?

**ANNE DE MARCKEN:** During my month at Millay, I finished my second book *It Lasts Forever and Then It's Over*. It won the **New Directions Novel Prize** and was published in 2024 simultaneously by New Directions (in North America), Fitzcarraldo Editions (in the UK) and Giramondo (in Australia). I have just completed a national book tour with readings.

**ELI NIXON:** *Bloodtide* started as (and still is!) a proposal for a new holiday in homage to horseshoe crabs, with an illustrated manual and field notes for activation. It's drawn from my own need for new cultural practices and is extended as an invitation for anybody to use and adjust to fit your homaging and DIY holidayification needs.

I found the heart of this primordia/futuristic effort while at Millay in 2020 (thank goodness cause the due date was looming!). Anne edited and formatted in a frenzy and the book was published by The 3rd Thing Press in 2021, with a second edition in 2022. Miraculously, the manual is now building the holiday and *Bloodtide* is book AND a holiday, a field trip and a flag dance, a suitcase show and a bike ride. It's crabaoke power ballads in the park and naturedrag workshops full of moss dancers. The holiday has activated queer climate justice kinship with the cardboard brine shrimp of Great Salt Lake. It's going on 24/7 in the stairwell of The Providence Public Library as a 450 million year timeline installation of organisms, made from recyclables, and the hands of 300 Modern Humans. It has become dozens of detritivore pies, directed thousands of dollars to Black and Indigenous led land and healing projects, inspired gallons of blood donation, and at least one tick-shaped

pinata ritual. The holiday continues to hatch in myriad forms, across the continent, including and far beyond my body.

*Bloodtide* celebrates MEANWHILE and the moon. It attempts queer futurity, without mythologies of settler innocence and with sustained recognition that time extends through our ancestors: recent ones and ancient. *Bloodtide* promotes horizontalist structure building practices through pageantry, feasting and other hands-on, locally oriented, liberatory & survivalist practices. *Bloodtide* posits that homage and attention to horseshoe crabs might further all repair efforts and other insufficient necessities for our collective and individual transformation.

#### **Videos:**

[Bloodtide library installation opening >>](#)

[Bloodtide installation >>](#)

### **So, you two were at Millay years apart: how did you connect?**

**EN:** Anne and I met in 2009 at the (now defunct, RIP) Goddard College MFA graduation of Anne's partner M and me. We didn't know then that [The 3rd Thing Press](#) would be born or that 11 years later Anne would be my editor! What a gift! My friend Megan Sandberg-Zakian read my Goddard thesis in 2009 (and directed my puppet show in 2013) and in 2020, The 3rd Thing published her book. She put a worm in Anne's ear that I had a book in me. The holiday wouldn't be here without the faith of those 2 brilliant forces and dozens of others that believed in the process...

### **Can you share something about your experience at Millay Arts?**

**ADM:** All the lightness and possibility that I feel now, anticipating the vast life the book will have, I felt at Millay while I was working on finishing it: wrestling through sticking points on meandering walks across the fields or headlong plunges into the woods; cutting up pages, arranging and rearranging them on the floor of my barn studio; one secret, wild celebratory dance on a picnic table when realized I had written the last line....

But most important, most sustaining—in the long years between finishing the book and publishing it—are the deep connections I made to the artists and writers I met at Millay. [Carlos Sirah](#), Natalie Smith, [Anja Marais](#), [Kyle Lucia Wu](#) and [Aricka Foreman](#)... all such good, smart, funny, supportive people. And all of them have been doing incredible things. In everyday life, I don't necessarily encounter other artists—at least not in such high concentration! I made true and lasting friendships at Millay with people who share my commitment and passion for this work of making things. Honestly I thought the most important things I'd get from the residency were time, space and the new perspective you get from being jarred out of your routine. And I did get all that. But it's that group of people who have turned out to matter most.

### **What are you working on now?**

**ADM:** When I began thinking about starting The 3rd Thing Press in 2019, I knew I wanted to

work with Carlos Sirah, whose studio was right next to mine in the barn. We kept almost opposite schedules at Millay Arts, passing each other in the halls and on paths, but spent long hours talking over dinner and in between times. His extraordinary book *The High Alive* is among the first we published in 2020. And he and I are working right now on a 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary critical edition of Jean Toomer's *Cane*. His imaginative reach and critical depth are stunning. Together with Diane Exavier (whose book-length poem *The Math of Saint Felix* we published in 2021), we've re-conceived the critical edition as an oracular card deck that will include insights, gestures and provocations offered by more than four dozen Black thinkers, writers and makers. Aricka, who was working on her collection *Salt Body Shimmer* (YesYes Books, 2020) while we were at Millay Arts, is going to be a part of the *Cane* oracular deck, and she contributed work to our anthology *Joy Has a Sound: Black Sonic Visions* in 2021. And Natalie Smith is a constant source of support, inspiration and laughter. I'm just waiting for the project we get to do together!

I think there are probably bunch of other Millay Arts alums among our authors. It starts to be almost a hallmark of people doing innovative work. I know for sure Eli Nixon spent a month at Millay Arts because they were there while they were working on *Bloodtide*, which we published in 2021. And I know Naima Lowe was there shortly before I arrived (I don't remember if I found her name on the wall)—she has a film in our first time-based publication, *Good Symptom: A Serial Anthology of Time-Based Disturbances*, which will launch this coming fall.

*Good Symptom* and *Cane* are both available for now through The 3rd Thing Press' [Kickstarter Campaign](#), along with Summer J. Hart's haunting and haunted poetry collection *Boomhouse*, and Alissa Hattman's beautiful, elegiac novel *Sift*. It's always amazing to run these crowdfunding campaigns—they are high stress, but really worth it because of how much they expand the community of support for interdisciplinary, intersectional work. At this point, we've reached our funding goal, so now everything is icing on that cake. It is all about reaching the people who will really love these projects... which truly is what it's always about. Connecting people across time and space by way of art.

**EN:** Currently I've been cooking on *wrack zone*—a theatrical thought bubble puffing out of *Bloodtide*. *wrack zone* is an indoor coastal naturedrag pageant, clown show, and DIY effort to unsettle time. Starring an iron-age bog body, Hulk Hogan's ghost, Pangea-in-process, and at least one massive flock of endangered shore birds, this puny human play reckons with five billion years of the moon. Amidst 450 million years of horseshoe crabs, the tide(x2), SPF 50, and an egg salad sandwich in the sun. *wrack zone* messes with intertidal space/time and invites audiences into low-stakes collaboration through drawing prompts, snack eating and fabric handling. Bask in cardboard anthropomorphism and poetic semaphore. Join us to be overtaken.

R&D are ongoing and I'm looking for venues, producers, collaborating forces of all kinds that might make it possible to do again soon!

We had 2 nights of work-in-progress sharing at The Public Theater in January as part of my participation in their Devised Theater Working Group, for which I had the delight of working with 2 co-directors, a cellist, and an 8 person ensemble. At the end of May, we had the

opportunity to do it again/anew with just me, the cellist/sound artist, and an overhead projection/props person. Who knows how it may transpire next! Have ideas? Please reach out at [450millionyearsago@gmail.com](mailto:450millionyearsago@gmail.com).

[Learn more at Anne de Marcken's website >>](#)

[Learn more at Eli Nixon's website >>](#)

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## Robin Dintiman + Beth Tillman

**VISUAL ARTS 2023 + NONFICTION 2023**





### **So how did this collaboration come about?**

**ROBIN DINTIMAN:** I had wanted a residency at Millay for years. However, I was dealing with termmany family members with terminal illnesses prevented my applying. I was fascinated by Millay Arts' Nancy Graves library (the legendary artist/sculptor who graduated from Vassar and gifted her collection to Millay Arts' in her will as a nod to Vincent's alma mater as well), so I initially planned to use this resource as a starting off

point for a new body of work. I was so excited that I actually arrived a day early (having not checked the acceptance email again); needless to add, I immediately began my journey into Vincent's past.

A friend who lived nearby hosted me for a night, and gave me a book of Vincent's poetry; we talked well into the night about haunted homes in New England. (I had heard about the appearance of Vincent's ghost for many years so I hoped that she would make herself known. My study of the ineffable between, a bardo of sorts, began many years ago with a find at a used bookstore in Petaluma. This book explained how to shoot auras -- or Orbs, capturing spirits and the energy that surrounds them.)

My third morning at Millay, Beth, a charming writer close in age also in residence, arrived from the Barn for breakfast quite early. Seeing her, I was alarmed and asked if she was okay as she looked a bit ill and very pale. In her lovely Southern drawl Beth answered: "No, I'm not sick, Vincent came into my room last night. Actually, into my bed..."

Knowing Beth at bit, and knowing that in addition to being a writer she is also an accomplished Estates attorney, I never doubted her story. We launched into a deep discussion about and around death, including feelings of loss -- things left to do, things half done, things never to be done -- and the resultant complexity of feelings. The conversation was a bit like speaking in shorthand about a very profound subject, and I experienced a strong sense of déjà vu (that ended up lasting my entire time at Millay). Reacting to Beth's recounting, I sensed a deep spiritual turmoil related to Vincent and her life and death. On our last day together, Beth and I met for a picnic of egg salad sandwiches, eaten on the stone bench near the garden, by the natural pond where Vincent and her husband hosted their gatherings and in view of her writing cabin: a place next to the Vincent's house, that is best described as "thick" (a place/space where the air/energy is ripe with history, memory, sense and feeling).

After Beth left, thinking about our talks and her visitation, I thought "Well, I must get going on my explorations of this complex poet." So I went out searching for more clues. As I drove down the dirt road that leads to Steepletop, I noticed a large forked (or dowsing) branch sticking out of the woods about 50 feet in: it wasn't far from the entrance to a trail, and it was very big and very distinctive. Wresting it out of the wet earth, I noticed a pile of birch tree tops, poking through the leaf layer of the forest floor. For me, this was an astonishing find. I often go salvaging for found materials to use in my pieces, and feel a special connection to natural elements that are the result of some kind of disaster, weather or other. Personally, this process and practice is deeply resonant to my own efforts to both make sense and make anew following traumatic events and the loss of loved ones.) I also took a great many photos, attempting to use the strategies outlined in my used book to capture Orbs in and around the residency buildings and grounds. This project ended up becoming a book of photos and text, with a guest essay by Beth, *The Materiality of Being Invisible*.

The resulting sculpture (seen above) was installed in the alcove of the Main House. Both the installation and the book were envisioned to express the sense of aloneness I imagined Vincent felt and struggled her during her life that I also identified with. It was my attempt to assuage the distress Beth felt that I also shared, as well as create a kind of balm for

Vincent's lingering agitated presence.

**BETH TILLMAN:** While in residence at Millay Arts in June of 2023, I woke one night in my barn bedroom at 3 a.m. and found Edna St. Vincent Millay sitting next to me. I had hoped for many things to come from my residency. I had planned to revise my memoir, maybe write an essay. Perhaps, as lagniappe, I would visit her home and see the books in her library, which I later learned is closed to visitors. I did not expect to meet her.

Vincent's hair was wavy and short, her face was unlined and just shy of beautiful. I recognized her from the photographs I had seen. She smoked a cigarette that had no odor. She talked and I listened, half-afraid, half-enthralled. She wasn't happy. She wanted me to do something about her unhappiness, but the exact solution she sought was unclear. Her last words to me were, "Light a candle by your bed if you want me to return another time." Then rapidly her face aged and she became very old. I closed my eyes, shook my head. I tried to cross back into the reality I knew and understood, one that didn't contain her. I succeeded and she was gone.

I need you to know I am a rational human being. I have practiced estate law for almost thirty years. I have not encountered spirits, but I often write about death. I write about my clients and the struggles they have over what to do with their estates, including all their tangible things.

I slept only a little after that. Upset but not scared, I had to tell someone what had happened, but I feared telling my cohort. We had only been there two days, and I didn't want them to think me mad. I googled "Millay" and "haunted" and "barn." I found a few things. After breakfast that morning, I read some of the journal entries of residents covering decades of the residency to see if anyone else had had a similar experience. Some commented about voices and footsteps, about doors being opened that had been left closed. But I didn't see any about Vincent making an appearance.

I decided to tell one of the residents I had talked with the day after we arrived: Robin Dintiman, a gifted artist/photographer, who was an artist in my age group (over fifty, let's say). In our first conversation, we talked about loss and art, about death and its teachings, about what it means to try to convey the meaning of grief through words and photos. I felt connected to her, that we understood each other. I thought she was a safe person to tell. I told her my ghost story. When I started to recount all of it, she stopped me because my face had turned pale, and I was distraught. But she believed me completely. We hiked into the woods and found the gin bottle pile, a pile of hidden pain, like the pain I had seen in Vincent's face.

Robin began to take photos of the inside of Vincent's house and her writing cabin through the windowpanes. She was creating art from what I had told her, and I found comfort in that. I struggled to write, feeling uneasy in my studio, until one day I began to revise the ending of my book. At last, I wrote with ease and tears, tapping into something I had been wanting to say for a long time about my life as a death lawyer.

Throughout the residency, Robin and I talked. We walked to the graves. We ate a picnic. We theorized about why Vincent had chosen to visit me. I decided it might be because I spend so much of my time cleaning up people's lives. Vincent's house has never been emptied of

her stuff, all of her tangible things frozen as if in amber, preserved by the decree of her sister. Perhaps Vincent saw me as someone who would understand her distress.

Robin created a book of photographs, *The Materiality of Being Invisible*, from her time in residency. She asked me to write a piece to be included with the photo of the inside of the writing cabin. Moved by her request, I wrote an essay, "I Want to Offer This Explanation," to Vincent, telling her why we keep her things intact. Robin also created a permanently installed piece outside the Composer's Studio, inspired by Vincent and her continued presence on the property. I like knowing that something stressful, inexplicable, and strange that happened to me resulted in art that others will see and enjoy.

I never lit a candle for Vincent to return, but after her visit, the door of my studio often stood open when I returned from a meal. I heard low voices and footfalls above me at night in the barn. She has not shown up at my house in North Carolina. I think of her as tied to her Millay home. Robin has become a true friend, and I will be going to NYC to see her show in the fall at A.I.R. Gallery. I finished my revisions and am seeking representation for the memoir. I have started a second book, one that finds me still writing about death, but also about what is beyond all this, about what is contained in the invisible. Vincent and Robin opened the door.

### **What have you been working on since your time in residence?**

BT: I am continuing to revise my memoir, the working title is *Love the Ending*.

RD: Since leaving Millay, I continued making work and was delighted to come to the Gala, sharing this story and the resulting book and installation with guests and other alums. In addition to a solo exhibition of my photographs at the Heron Hall Gallery of the [Laguna de Santa Rosa](#), an organization that works to preserve the wetlands of Sonoma County (the Foundation helped produce a catalogue with gravures, *Palladiums* and silver gelatin prints, *Water and Dreams*), I am having another one-person show in October at the [A.I.R. Gallery](#) in Brooklyn, *Ineffable Between*, an installation with sculpture, textiles, printmaking and photography. And I can't wait to see Beth again!

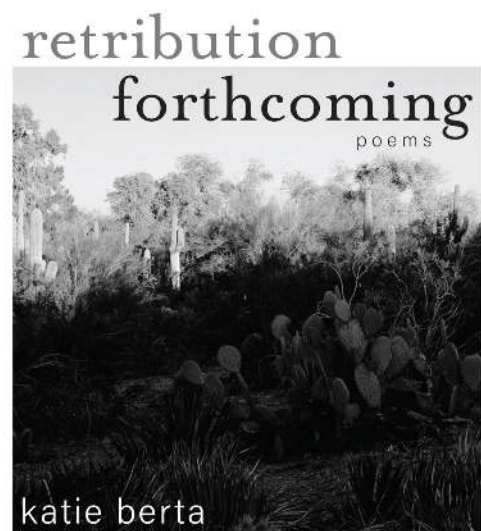
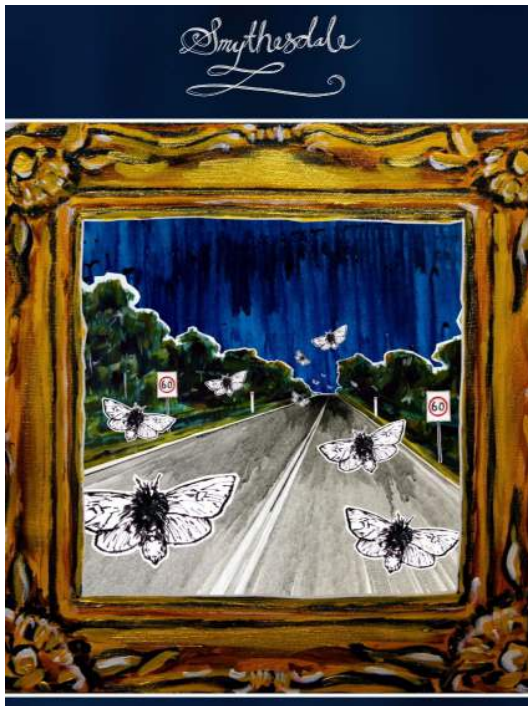
[Learn more at Robin Dintiman's website>>](#)

[Learn more at Beth Tillman's website>>](#)

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Wally Gunn + Katie Berta

COMPOSING 2020/2024 + POETRY 2020



winner of the HOLLIS SUMMERS POETRY PRIZE  
selected by CLARE WATMAN-HOLM

**So how did this collaboration come about, following both of your departures from Millay?**

**WALLY GUNN:** In June 2020, I was commissioned by an excellent Australian chamber ensemble, **Rubiks Collective** (flute, clarinet, cello, piano, percussion), to write a song cycle for the ensemble with a guest vocalist, the amazing Australian performer and composer **Gian Slater**. They wanted to create a piece that took as its starting point the story of the '**52Hz Whale**,' a whale that has been recorded again and again in the Pacific Ocean since the 1980s, singing in a unique, previously undocumented range, but has never been traced to a single individual, or even to a known species. The mystery of the whale

brings to mind themes of welcome solitude, loneliness, belonging, and otherness that resonated with the ensemble, with me, and with so many others since the height of the global pandemic, 2020 – 2021. We decided we would look for texts from a variety of sources, both historical and contemporary. Once I started working on the piece in earnest, around September 2021, the time came to choose contemporary texts. I thought immediately of my Millay Arts colleague Katie Berta, and asked her whether she would be interested in contributing some material to the project. I was thrilled when she said yes and promptly sent through some poems and fragments that seemed to echo our theme. I continued work on the project in dedicated periods, building up material for a development in Melbourne in April 2022 (which included one song featuring Katie's writing), and then again for a second development in December 2023 (which include another two songs featuring Katie's writing). In the December 2023 development, we solidified all the material and made demo recordings which the ensemble included in applications for funding the work's presentation.

**KATIE BERTA:** First, I was so honored when Wally asked me to participate in this project. In my experience, his music is able to be, at once, conceptual and emotive. I find his work mind-expanding, intellectual, *and* immediate, experiential—so rare in any medium, I think. So I was floored to be asked, as a person who considered myself a fan as well as a friend. The project itself—thinking about an animal with a solitary life, about making art in solitude, about singing to oneself, in a way—felt so intimately in touch with the themes of the book I was writing while at Millay and the years after, the poems of which were considering how we make a life with others when, sometimes, the presence of others enters us uncomfortably, is invasive. It really made me feel connected, even across space, since we were, by then, far apart, to know that Wally was thinking and working through these things too. And seeing how my poems were transformed during this process was moving, interesting, invigorating. The collaboration still has me thinking about genre, medium, poetic form, and how each of these shape and are shaped by the possibilities embedded in the content, the artist, the instrument.

### **Where is the project now?**

**WG:** The entire work has been completed, and consists of eleven songs. Three of the songs feature poems by Katie Berta. The ensemble successfully received funding to theatrically stage the song cycle in Melbourne, Australia, featuring Gian Slater as guest vocalist, with the addition of new original electronic incidental music by [Tilman Robinson](#), and new film by [Chris Bennett and Underground Media](#). The ensemble is aiming to stage the work in December 2024 in Melbourne, but performance dates are as yet unconfirmed. Plans to tour the work at international arts festivals, especially in Australia and New Zealand in 2025 and beyond, are underway.

### **Can you share something about your experience at Millay Arts?**

**WG:** It was so wonderful to enjoy Katie's company throughout the time we were together at Millay. She has an uplifting energy, and a sharp wit, and she made me laugh a lot! But it was during the studio visits, when Katie read us some poetry from the project she'd been

working on prior to and during our time at Millay, that I really understood for the first time what a talent she is. The material was so wise, insightful, vulnerable, and powerful; it made my jaw drop to hear it, and I was deeply moved. I remember filing out of her studio, along with the other residents, with her poetry ringing gently and clearly through my head like a bell, and it really stayed with me.

**KB:** As for a favorite memory, I also remember the studio visits very clearly. Being in the space where Wally composes made me feel like I was let in on a secret, and listening to his work there was completely spellbinding—feeling a quietness coming over your own body and the bodies of all of the residents as we listened was emotional. As a group, we were totally absorbed and connected by that feeling. I also remember many times when I'd be going about my day, making a sandwich in the kitchen, say, and would be suddenly ROCKED by hearing Wally playing in his studio. It was so inspiring—the music itself, and also knowing Wally was working a few yards away. Wally himself was a genial and kind LIGHT during our time at Millay. And he was a role model to me—for his artistry and intelligence, his dedication (I think he worked the hardest of all of us), and his graciousness.

### **What are you working on now?**

**WG:** Right now I'm in the EU, working on a full-length opera in collaboration with Dutch theater company [Het Geluid](#), commissioned by [La Monnaie](#) opera house, which will premiere at the end of 2025 in Brussels, Belgium; and a piece for six high voices commissioned by Leipzig vocal ensemble [Sjaella](#), which will premiere at the end of 2025 in Bonn, Germany, at Beethovenfest.

Schedule

**KB:** I published my first book, [retribution forthcoming](#), in March and began sending out the manuscript I was working on while I stayed at Millay—it's been transformed in many ways (while I was there, I was working on it as a novel in verse, but since then the narrative elements have been stripped away and I've been left with a slightly more traditional poetry manuscript of disconnected poems). Poems from that book have been published in several great journals, like *Ploughshares*, *The Yale Review*, and *The Cincinnati Review*. I'm working, now, on poems in a much more condensed, associative mode that might be a part of a manuscript called "The Internet." I've just started sending those out as well—they are forthcoming in *The Colorado Review* and *Southeast Review*, among others.

[Learn more at Wally Gunn's website>>](#)

[Learn more at Katie Berta's website>>](#)

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**Niva Dorell + Christola Phoenix + Misa Dayson**

**SCREENWRITING 2022 + NONFICTION 2022 + SCREENWRITING 2023**

# THE LOTTO LINE

A SHORT FILM BY NIVA DORELL  
BASED ON THE MEMOIR EXCERPT BY CHRISTOLA PHOENIX

*Community is everything*



**THE LOTTO LINE** is a short film inspired by an excerpt from Christola Phoenix's

**memoir "Paper Curls and Peanut Earrings" -- a coming-of-age tale -- set in 1950s and 60s Harlem, NY. The original excerpt, "The Lotto Line" was published in Roxane Gay's publication *The Audacity* in 2022.**

The film begins on a summer day in Harlem, NY when 75-year-old Christola, a retired nurse, is in line at her corner bodega waiting to place her daily lottery numbers. A young woman enters who doesn't have enough money to buy a roll of bread. Like everyone else in the bodega, Christola doesn't offer to help her. But the young woman's desperation triggers Christola's memories of her own childhood, growing up poor in a one-room tenement apartment with her mother, Rosalee. On the rare occasion when Rosalee's numbers would hit, allowing them to afford a decent meal, she insisted on sharing that meal with their neighbor down the hall. "When we have, we share," Rosalee would tell Young Christola.

Unable to shake the young woman from her mind, adult Christola tosses and turns at night in her luxury apartment, the same one she and Rosalee once viewed as a model apartment when she was a child. When she wakes up, she asks the Universe's forgiveness for not helping the young woman in the bodega and vows to do better next time. Days later, at a crucial moment, she gets just such an opportunity, but will she step off the lotto line and help?

### **How did this three-way collaboration come about?**

**ND:** I first encountered Christola's story, *The Lotto Line*, when she read it to a few of us in residence with her at Millay Arts in April 2022. I was immediately struck by its visceral poignancy and level of detail. I could see, feel, and hear the world that she was describing and was deeply moved by the true story of a moment in her daily routine that ended up having a profound effect on her life. Her story seemed to perfectly symbolize the urgent need for more compassion in today's world, a theme that is close to my heart and resonates in all my films.

A testament to the power of Christola's story is that I was still thinking about it months later. In the fall of 2022, I wrote to Christola asking if we could get together. During our meeting I asked if she would consider letting me adapt *The Lotto Line* into a short film and direct it. I was thrilled and humbled when she said yes to both.

**CP:** I did the final edits during my residency at Millay Arts of *The Lotto Line*, an excerpt from my memoir which was about to be published. One evening during our after round table dinner discussion, it was suggested, if you wanted, to share your work with your fellow residents after dinner. I was the last to read, and after my last spoken word of *The Lotto Line*, there was radio silence. After a few minutes, my fellow residents commented on the beauty of my story of place, time and the character. Niva was the last to comment and she was visually and emotionally moved. I was emotionally moved by comments from my fellow writers that my story was really good and resonated with them.

Late Fall of 2022 I received an email from Niva that she was coming to the city and wondered if I would be around for lunch to catch up, and also, she wanted to propose an idea to me. We set a date and we met for lunch. I wondered, what was it she wanted to propose to me?

We met for lunch in Harlem. It was good to see Niva again. Niva was the best cook during our weekend dinners at Millay Arts, and I complimented her again for her culinary skills. Niva shared with me how moved she was by my story and how it has stayed with her, and she wanted to do a short film of *The Lotto Line*.

“A SHORT FILM OF THE LOTTO LINE?” I blurted out in the restaurant and a few heads turned my way. She suggested that I think about it. I could not control the stretch of my grin showcasing my front tooth gap. I thought about it for one day. I said yes.

### **And then there was Misa!**

**ND:** There have been quite a few serendipitous moments in the process of making this film so far. One of them was discovering that Christola’s daughter Misa is also a film producer and filmmaker. The three of us had several meetings early on at Christola’s place over Indian food where we talked about how to write the film. Film adaptations, even autobiographical ones, are never 100% literal. There’s always some degree of dramatization to make the story work for the screen. Misa has been instrumental in helping to find the right balance in the script and will continue to do so when we shoot the film. I feel incredibly lucky and grateful to have her support. She has also brought essential partners to the project, including producer Dessa Vanderhorst, who used to work on the TV show *POSE*.

The fact that Misa also had a residency at Millay is yet another one of those things that make the project feel both connected to Millay in a very unique way and somehow destined to be.

**CP:** When I received notification of my acceptance to Millay Arts, I immediately shared the news with my daughters, Misa and Robin. Misa is in the film industry. She said she did some quiet bragging to her friends about her Mom being accepted to Millay Arts. In her research she discovered there was a residency program for parents. She being a first-time parent of a child born during Covid-19, finding time and space to write and work on her project was hit and miss. Unbeknownst to me she applied for a residency fellowship at Millay Arts and got it! I did bragging rights about her. I shared with Misa Niva’s proposal to do a short film of *The Lotto Line*, and she was very supportive of the project.

**MD:** When I wanted to email my friends who know my Mom—and have been enthusiastically curious about, and supportive of, her writing career journey after she retired from nursing— that she had received yet another awesome writing residency, I couldn’t remember the exact details about Millay. As I researched the website for information to include in my email announcement, I was excited to learn about Millay’s partnership with [Pen Parentis](#). This partnership offered shorter residency stays for writers who were parents of children younger than 18 in an effort to make artists residencies more inclusive of, and accessible to, writer parents. At the time I was navigating how to find time to write in between balancing the work of taking care of my then-18 month old child, and the work of earning a salary. I decided to take a leap of faith and quietly applied for the residency. To this day I remain thankful that I was accepted into Millay’s Core Residency; I wrote more in 2 weeks there than I had in two months!

In between all of this going on, my Mom shared with me how much she enjoyed both her residency at Millay, and meeting a new friend, Niva Dorell. For months she kept saying that she wanted Niva and I to meet because Niva was also a writer and film director. Towards the end of the year, our schedules aligned and the three of us met for dinner at my Mom's home. That's when Niva shared with me her vision for turning *The Lotto Line* into a film. I was struck by the beauty and care in how Niva articulated her vision for turning the short story into a film, and could literally see the film as she spoke it. It reminded me of how I first felt when I read the the story, and knew that viewing audiences would feel the same way after watching Niva's film.

### **So at where is the "The Lotto Line" now?**

**ND:** We are currently in the fundraising stage of *THE LOTTO LINE* and will begin pre-production in the spring of 2025. We plan to have the film completed by August 2025.

### **Can you share something about your experience at Millay Arts?**

**ND:** The nature surrounding Millay was a never ending source of inspiration. We were there in April, when the area is between winter and spring. One day it would snow, the next it would all be melted, then it would rain, then everything would be covered in mist, then the sun would come out and it was hot! Every evening at dinner we would share some new discovery that we encountered on our individual walks every day: blue animal droppings on the walking path (what kind of animal was that? we wondered), freshly hatched tadpoles struggling to survive in the nearby puddles, a patch of green where there hadn't been the day before. One night a young bear loped across the field by the main house at sunset, apparently unaware of the seven human faces pressed up against the glass staring at it. What a sight! Another time we were singing around the firepit at night and some animal in the woods responded with something between a howl and a hoot. We would sing, it would hoot, we would sing a little more, it would hoot again...and on we went for an entire song. It was hilarious and beautiful and magical all at once.

**CP:** Donna's cooking. Soooooo GOOD.

**MD:** Donna's cooking for sure. She can BURN, okay?! And for those who don't know, that's a colloquial way of saying, she can COOK! Another standout was the sheer beauty of the natural world around us. I had never spent time in that part of New York State before, and every day on my walks felt like I had either entered an enchanted forest, or nature's church. I could never decide. I'm such a city girl, and so I felt like such a wide-eyed innocent child astounded in wonder when, on the last evening of our residency, right after dinner, a big old Black Bear ambled up Millay's driveway to poke around the garbage bins for food. We were all standing around—not so many yards away—pointing and saying to each other, "Woah! Oh my goodness! Do you see this?!" And I thought it was hilarious that while that was going on, the bear, besides a brief pause and uninterested glance to the side, paid us no mind and meandered back on down the road (that I often walked!) like it was just a regular day in the neighborhood.

### **WANT TO GET INVOLVED?**

[\*\*HELP MAKE THE LOTTO LINE HAPPEN>>\*\*](#)

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# IDEOLOGY

A TRANS\* POETRY WORKSHOP SERIES



And in another collaboration (this time with FIVE alumni, in celebration of our 50th Anniversary), Millay Arts celebrated Pride by hosting *IDEOLOGY*, a series of virtual poetry workshops (offered on a sliding scale so no one was turned away) that transgressed to impress, featuring creative prompts and performances by five of our brilliant trans\* and nonbinary alums: [wo chan](#), [Ching-in Chen](#), [Bianca Rae Messinger](#), [Jayson P. Smith](#), and [Emji Saint Spero](#). Expansive, ecstatic, and deliciously complicit, these workshops were designed to be critical, expansive, interactive, and exploratory. Gender confirmation poetry at its finest.

In *Sonnet is the Gown* with [wo chan](#), we read sonnets by queers and read sonnets queerly, looking at fulfillments and subversions of the sonnet as queer(ed), embodied performances. Tradition: do we flout it? Or do we comply...maliciously? We read, discussed, altered, and finally pranced by generating our own sonnets.



[Ching-In Chen](#) facilitated *Spells for Safety*. Using the anthology *Poetry as Spellcasting: Poems, Essays, and Prompts for Manifesting Liberation and Reclaiming Power*, they guided us in collectively creating and dreaming poem-rituals and spells as freedom maps for ourselves and our communities.

[Bianca Rae Messinger's](#) workshop *Love in Excess* centered around the power of love (in writing) as a strategy for transcending bodily limitations. Through a series of exercises in writing from the body-mind—triangulation, writing through others, conjuring others, hallucinatory translation—we explored how an ecstatic relationship to love permits us to expand the limits of our perception and desire.





Jayson P. Smith's presented *(in)articulations, or, what we mean when we say "craft,"* a workshop offering writers an opportunity to reconsider the idea of craft as a somatic interrogation, asking, What memories/experiences/habits guide the choices you make on the page? How can we use them to redefine how you understand yourself as a poet?

Emji Saint Spero's workshop *Slip into something more uncomfortable* explored how wielding illegibility and incoherence can be an embodied poetic strategy for reclaiming agency. Through somatic writing prompts, we generated work that resists, refuses, and deconstructs as an opening to imagine other possibilities, to encounter unexpected intimacies.



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## The Vincent Prize

**SUPPORT TRANS\* ARTISTS!**

Did you know we started a fellowship honoring Vincent's maverick queerness and legacy in 2021? Please consider adding your support to not only cover the expense of a month-long residency but also to provide an essential stipend (offsetting time away from work/home/caring/travel)/materials) to support gifted trans,\* two-spirit, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming artists.

GIVE TO THE VINCENT PRIZE

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