

Excellence Awards

Choreography

Esther Baker-Tarpaga is a choreographer and interdisciplinary artist. Her dances are site-responsive and collaborative. She is the co-founder of Baker & Tarpaga Dance Project, a transnational dance company based in Ougadougou and Philadelphia. She is also the co-founder of Propelled Animals, an interdisciplinary arts and social justice collective and recipient of a MAP Grant and USAI Fund. She is also part of Earthdance's Interdisciplinary Artist Consortium and currently teaches at Temple University's Boyer College of Music and Dance. She has performed at The Chicago Architecture Biennale, The Englert Theatre, Bali Spirit Festival, and The Wassaic Festival among others, and received grants from the NY Live Arts Suitcase Fund, NY Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and a 2012 recipient of an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award. She received her M.F.A. in Dance from UCLA and her B.A. from Bowdoin College.

Ramón Flowers is a dancer and choreographer who has been featured in several Broadway shows including *The Lion King*, *Cats*, *The Boy from Oz*, and *Hot Feet*, among others. He has been featured in commercials, film, and television, and was the first male black dancer at the Pennsylvania Ballet Company. Flowers spent twelve years as a principal ballet dancer in Europe, where he spent time learning under the legendary Maurice Bejart. He also worked with choreographer Nacho Duato in Madrid with the National de Danza de Espana. He teaches ballet at the Dance Festival Summer Intensive at Duke University when he is not teaching at Butler University. Flowers studied at the School for the Pennsylvania Ballet and earned his M.F.A. in Dance from the University of Iowa.

Claire Porter is a choreographer and performer known for her comedic text and movement work. She is the creator of *Portables*, a series of solo comedic movement monologues performed individually and in concert. *Portables* has been performed across the US and in Scotland, India, and numerous other countries. Porter performed *Namely*, *Muscles*, which is the recipient of the NYC Fringe Festival 2010's Overall Excellence Award and UnitedSolo Festival 2015's Best Poetry Show, at numerous festivals, conferences, and theaters. Porter teaches Laban Movement Analysis for New York University Steinhardt School and is the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation Residency in Italy, a Guggenheim Fellowship, several National Endowment for the Arts Choreography Fellowships, among other awards. She has also received commissions from The American Dance Festival, Art Matters, Vogue Magazine, among other organizations.

Excellence Awards

Criticism

Lauren O’Neill Butler is a writer, editor and educator. She is also a cofounder of *November* magazine. Her criticism and non-fiction essays have appeared in publications ranging from *Art Journal* to *The New York Times*, in addition to many artist monographs. From 2008 – 2019 she was a senior editor at *Artforum*. As a freelance editor and writer she has worked with galleries, museums, and artists for over fifteen years. She has written numerous features, columns, and exhibition reviews since 2005 and has published over 150 interviews with artists, filmmakers, and other luminaries. Butler is the recipient of a 2020 Warhol Foundation Art Writers Grant. She is currently a part-time faculty member at Hunter College and the New School, and she holds graduate degrees in art history and philosophy.

Pradeep Dalal is a Mumbai- born artist and writer based in New York. His work has been shown at EFA Project Space, New York (2019); Callicoon Fine Arts, New York (2017); Sala Diaz, San Antonio, Texas (2017); and Murray Guy, New York (2011); among other venues. His photographs have been included in publications such as *Blind Spot*, *BOMB*, *Cabinet*, *Grey Room*, *Nueva Luz*, and *Rethinking Marxism*. His artist book *Bhopal, MP* (2017) was excerpted in *Chandigarh Is in India* (2016), and his essay “A Bifocal Frame of Reference” was published in *Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design* (2013). He published *Photography in the Sensorium* with Fia Backström in the Pratt Photography Imprint (2021). He cochaired the Photography Department in the MFA program at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, from 2015 to 2020. He has also taught at Pratt Institute, Cooper Union and the International Center of Photography. He directs the Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant in New York.

Excellence Awards

Fiction – Panel 1

Robert Anthony Siegal is an American writer fascinated by East Asia and the experience of cross-cultural encounters, place, family, and food. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Smithsonian*, and *The Oxford American*, among other publications and has two published novels, *All The Money in The World* and *All Will be Revealed*. Siegal is the recipient of The Fulbright Scholarship in Taiwan and a Mombukagakusho Fellowship in Japan. Other awards include the O. Henry and Pushcart Prizes. Siegal has been interviewed and spoken about his work on NPR, as well as other radio stations. He is currently a contributing editor for *The Harvard Review* and *Scoundrel Time*.

Hannah Pittard is the author, most recently, of the novel *Visible Empire*, which was Amazon’s Editor’s Pick for Summer Fiction, an IndieNext List Pick, a *New York Times* “New and Noteworthy” selection, and *O Magazine* Book of Summer, among other honors. She is the winner of the 2006 Amanda Davis Highwire Fiction Award, a MacDowell Colony Fellow, and a consulting editor for *Narrative Magazine*. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *American Scholar*, *Oxford American*, and many other publications.

Hillary Leichter is a writer and educator. She is the author of the novel *Temporary*, which was shortlisted for The Center for Fiction First Novel Prize and longlisted for the PEN/Hemingway Award. Her writing has appeared in *n+1*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper’s*, *The New York Times*, and *New York Magazine*’s “The Cut”. She is the recipient of fellowships from the Folger Shakespeare Library and the New York Foundation for the Arts. She teaches fiction at Columbia University, New York, NY.

Excellence Awards

Fiction – Panel 2

Jacob Guajardo is a fiction writer whose story, “What Got Into Us” was featured in *The Best American Short Stories, 2018* (edited by Roxane Gay). His other stories have been published in numerous journals and anthologies, such as *Passages North*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Wigleaf*, and *Hobart*. Guajardo is a recipient of the Edward and MacDowell Fellowship.

Tanya Rey is a queer Cuban-American writer who was born and raised in Miami, Florida. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Guernica*, *Granta*, *The Sun, Roads & Kingdoms*, *McSweeney’s Internet Tendency*, *The Georgia Review*, and *Catapult*, among others. She holds an MFA degree in fiction from New York University and has received fellowships from the Rona Jaffe Foundation, San Francisco Writers Grotto, MacDowell, Hedgebrook, UCross, Blue Mountain Center, I-Park, and others. An early draft of her novel in progress was selected as a semi-finalist for the James Jones First Novel Fellowship and an excerpt was shortlisted for the 2020 Disquiet Literary Prize. Tanya has worked as managing editor for *One Story* and fiction editor for *Epiphany* and has taught creative writing at New York University and Writing Pad in San Francisco. She writes grants and copy for nonprofit organizations like 826 Valencia, the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation, College Track, and Small Business Majority. She lives in Oakland, California.

Brendan Shay Basham is a fiction writer, poet, educator, and former chef. His work has appeared in such publications as the *Sante Fe Literary Review*, *Red Ink*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Juked*, *Cloudthroat*, and *Sheepshead Review*. He has been awarded several awards and fellowships from Writing By Writers, Tin House, the Truman Capote Trust, and he was a nominee for the 2018 Pushcart Prize. Recently, he was awarded the first Native American Literary Award from the UCross Foundation. Basham is the Writers in Schools Coordinator with the Southern Ward, a nonprofit that works with youth in Tennessee. He holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts, and is in the process of publishing his first novel.

Excellence Awards

Music Composition

David Rakowski is a composer whose most well-known music is his set of 100 high-energy piano etudes, which are performed worldwide. He is the recipient of the Rome Prize, The Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Barlow Prize, a Guggenheim fellowship, among others. He has also received commissions from organizations like the Fromm Foundation and Koussevitzky Foundation. Rakowski has twice been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and he was the Maurice Abravanel Distinguished Visiting Composer at the University of Utah twice. In 2016, he became an elected member of the Academy of Arts and Letters. He previously taught at Stanford University and Columbia University before joining the faculty of Brandeis in 1995.

Orrin Evans is a pianist, producer, composer, and collaborator. His new album, *The Evolution of Oneself* by Smokestack Records has a variety of influences from jazz, neo-soul, country to hip hop. He has led and co-led over 25 albums, including albums with his neo-soul/acid jazz ensemble *Luv Park* and the bracing collective trio *Tarbaby*. His band *Captain Black Big Band*, founded in 2009, has had a long-running Monday night residency at New York's Smoke Jazz & Supper Club. This band also has two critically-acclaimed albums to its name and was named a Rising Star Big Band of the Year in the 61st annual DownBeat Critics Poll. Evans has performed or collaborated with musicians from all over the world.

Yu-Chun Chein received her doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music degrees from Manhattan School of Music in New York, and her Bachelor of Music degree from Taipei National University of Arts in Taiwan. Chein's compositions and arrangements have performed worldwide and has received numerous prizes, awards, scholarships, grants, and commissions, including the Second Prize, the Orchestra's Choice and the Audience Choice in the Orchestra Competitions held by the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra. As a composer, she constantly searches for new means of expression, which can be transformed in personal intimate ways. Chien is currently Visiting Assistant Professor at West Virginia University. Previously, she was appointed coordinator of aural skills and coordinator of the theory tutoring program at Manhattan School of Music, where she served as a teaching fellow.

Excellence Awards

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES FY 2022

Alysia Abbott is the author of *Fairyland, A Memoir of My Father*, which was a *New York Times* Book Review Editors' Choice and an ALA Stonewall Award winner, a winner of the Madame Figaro Prix Heroine, and was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Awards. She grew up in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, the only child of gay poet and writer, Steve Abbott. As a journalist, essayist, and critic, she's written for *The Boston Globe*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Vogue*, *Marie Claire*, *TheAtlantic.com*, *TriQuarterly* and *Psychology Today*, among other publications. She holds an MFA in Creative Non-Fiction from New School University and was a contributing producer at WNYC Radio. Her first full-length book, *Fairyland* was completed with the help of a Ragdale Fellowship and the wonderful staff at W. W. Norton. She's presented *Fairyland* at bookstores, libraries, literary festivals and universities across the United States as well as on NPR's Weekend Addition, Fresh Air, The Brian Lehrer Show, KQED's Forum, and the BBC's Outlook, among other venues. The French edition of *Fairyland* was published by Edition Globe on March 12, 2015, with a series of events in Paris. Additionally, the book has been translated into Italian, Spanish, Polish, and Portuguese. She is also co-founder of The Recollectors Project, dedicated to remembering parents lost to AIDS and supporting the children they left behind. You can learn more about this project by listening to her interviews on The Leonard Lopate Show and Here & Now. Formerly the Director of the Boston Literary District, she now runs GrubStreet's Memoir Incubator Program in Boston. She currently lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her family.

Shastri Akella earned his MFA in Creative Writing and PhD. in Comparative Literature at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He previously worked for a street theater troupe and for Google. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Master's Review*, *Guernica*, *Electric Literature*, *World Literature Today*, *Rumpus*, *PANK*, and *The Common*, among other places. He's currently finishing up his novel, a queer love story between a street performer and a Jewish migrant set in 1990s India. He is represented by Chirs Clemans (Janklow & Nesbit). He is a 2021-2022 fiction fellow at the Fine Arts Works Center (Provincetown) His academic writing has appeared in peer-reviewed anthologies published by Northwestern University Press, Vernon Press, and Duke University Press, among others. He teaches English at Deerfield Academy where he also works on issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. He serves as the fiction editor at *Cosmonaut's Avenue* as well. He divides his time between Hyderabad (India) and Massachusetts.

Melissa Faliveno is the author of the essay collection, *Tomboyland*, named by NPR, New York Public Library, and *O, The Oprah Magazine* as a Best Book of 2020. Her essays and interviews have appeared in *Esquire*, *Paris Review*, and *Brooklyn Rail*, among others. She is currently the Kenan Visiting Writer at UNC Chapel Hill. Faliveno holds a B.A. in English and creative writing from the University of Wisconsin and an M.F.A. in nonfiction from Sarah Lawrence College, where she has taught in the graduate writing program and Writing Institute.

Excellence Awards

Playwriting/Screenplay

PANELIST
BIOGRAPHIES
FY 2022

Andrew S­ia­ñez-De La O is a Mexican-American writer from El Paso, Texas. He is currently a Huntington Playwriting Fellow at Huntington Theatre Company. His work often centers around the culture of the US-Mexico Border, whether as a more whimsical examination of border heritages and indigenous roots (THE ORTIZ TWINS ARE COMING HOME, Pipeline Theatre Company, NYC) or a darker, more pointed examination of a separation policy's effect on children (BORDERLINE, Echo Theater Company, LA). Additionally, considering the presence of the military on the border and in border communities, his work has explored the pressure placed on first and second generation children of immigrants (SANGRE MÍA, Playwrights Realm, NYC). His writing has been developed across the country with the support of additional companies such as Stages Houston, Fresh Ink Theatre, Milagro Theatre, and Company One. Additionally, he is a committee member for the WGA Audio Alliance, helping organize for a more equitable future for creators of audio drama. He is a scriptwriter for the Latinx children's fiction podcast, Timestorm, with Cocotazo Media and his play, THE ORTIZ TWINS ARE COMING HOME, is currently being adapted for audio in partnership with Stormfire Productions and slated for a 2021 release. Also, thanks to the support of Latinx in Publishing, he is starting work on his first young adult fantasy novel.

Ulya Aviral is a Turkish-American writer, director and producer living in Boston, Massachusetts. Recent projects include *Shut Your Eyes I'm Gonna Dance* and *My Nature* are both in the festival circuit. *My Nature* is recognized by the Boston Globe and is a Finalist at the 23rd Boston Turkish Film Festival at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. *Shut Your Eyes* is an Official Selection at the 11th Arizona Underground Film Festival and at the Queer Kampala International Film Festival in Uganda. She believes diverse stories like these need to be told because it makes a difference and impacts our culture and society. She teaches Film History and Intro to Narrative Drama courses at Emerson College and creative writing workshops at GrubStreet in Boston. Previously, she taught Writing for the Screen at Rhode Island School of Design, Oral Comm and Mass Media classes at Community College of Rhode Island. Her curiosity about humanity, identity, and existence shape thoughts and questions about our everyday conversations on gender, ethnicity, and culture. She double-majored in Sociology and Film & Media Studies with a minor in Cultural Studies & Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota and received a MFA in Film and Media Art from Emerson College in 2017.

Excellence Awards

Poetry – Panel 1

Peter Champion is a poet and writer who has won the Levis Reading Prize for his collection of poems, *The Lions: Poems* (2009). His formal and free verse poems deftly bridge intimate and social concerns. He has also written monographs and catalog essays for the painters Joseph McNamara and Eric Aho, among others. He regularly publishes literary and art criticism in numerous journals and has won the Pushcart Prize. Champion is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Wallace Stegner Fellowship, and the Joseph Brodsky Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is an associate professor in the department of creative writing at the University of Minnesota. He earned his B.A. from Dartmouth College and his M.A. from Boston University.

Janine Joseph is a poet and librettist from the Philippines. She is the author of *Driving Without a License* (2016), winner Kundiman Poetry Prize, and *Decade of the Brain* is forthcoming in January 2023 from Alice James Books. She is also co-editor of *UndocuPoetics: An Introduction*, an anthology of poetry and poetics forthcoming in 2023 from Harper Collins/Harper Perennial. Her poetry, essays, and critical writings have appeared in *The Nation*, *The Atlantic*, *The Georgia Review*, *Orion*, *Poets & Writers*, *The Rumpus*, *The Poem's Country: Place & Poetic Practice*, the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day series, and the Smithsonian's "What It Means to Be American" project. Her commissioned work for the Houston Grand Opera/HGOco, Washington Master Chorale, and Symphony New Hampshire includes *The Healers* (forthcoming), *Extraordinary Motion* (forthcoming), *What Wings They Were*, "On This Muddy Water": *Voices from the Houston Ship Channel*, and *From My Mother's Mother*. Joseph is the recipient of a MacDowell Fellowship and Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, among other honors, and is a co-organizer for UndocuPoets, a nonprofit organization that advocates for undocumented and formerly undocumented writers. She is an assistant professor of poetry at Oklahoma State University.

Excellence Awards

Poetry – Panel 2

Traci Brimhall is the author of four collections of poetry, numerous essays, as well as a children’s book, published in 2017. Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *The New Republic*, among other publications. Some of Brimhall’s awards include the Just Desserts Short Fiction Prize, a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship in Poetry, the Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellowship at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing. Her poetry comic collaboration with Eryn Cruft can be found in *Guernica*, *The Poetry Comics* and the *Nashville Review*. Brimhall earned her B.A. from Florida State University and her M.F.A. from Western Michigan University.

Michael Simms is an accomplished poet, writer, editor, publisher, teacher, and blogger. Three full-length collections of his poetry, four novels, and two widely adopted poetry textbooks have been published or are under contract with publishers. He has also been the lead editor of over 100 published books, including the bestselling Autumn House Anthology of Poetry, now in its third edition. Simms has taught at several universities, including Chatham University’s MFA program from 2005-2013. Simms lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Amber Flora Thomas writes lyrical poems that have won her prizes such as the Richard Peterson Poetry Prize, the Dylan Thomas Prize, the Ann Stanford Poetry Prize, and an individual artist grant from the Marin Arts Council. Her book of poems, *Eye of Water*, won the Cave Canem Poetry Prize, and her work has also appeared in anthologies like *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (2009). She has taught at Washington University, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, and Eastern Carolina University in Greenville. Flora Thomas received her B.A. from Humboldt State and an M.F.A. from Washington University in St. Louis