

AVANT GARDE

A Journal of Artful Candor

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOS – 2022 Issue

Tyra Douyon is a professional writer, poet, and educator. She earned a B.A. degree in English Education and an M.A. in Professional Writing from Kennesaw State University. She is co-editorial director of *The Headlight Review* and poetry reader/book reviews editor for *Gigantic Sequins*. She writes poetry that highlights the effects of mental health and the intersection of Afro-Caribbean and American identity. Her poetry has appeared in *Josephine Quarterly*, *Muse*, *Paper Dragon*, *Black Fox*, *Storm Cellar*, and elsewhere. She is also an alum of the *TinHouse* Writer's Workshop (2022). You can find her filling her shopping cart with too many flowers and visiting national parks with her dog, Mya.

Jeffrey Lamar Coleman is professor of English at St. Mary's College of Maryland, editor of *Words of Protest*, *Words of Freedom: Poetry of the American Civil Rights Movement and Era*, author of *Spirits Distilled: Poems*, and associate editor of the *Journal of Hip Hop Studies*.

Originally from St. Louis and currently residing in Philadelphia, **Destiny Crockett** is a scholar and collage artist. Her artistic practice is informed by African American sartorial practices of the mid-20th century through the present. Her collages are also inspired by her scholarly interests, such as Black feminist theory, African American women's literature, and Black girlhood studies. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in English.

Stephanie Jones is assistant professor of Rhetoric and Writing Studies and associate director of First-Year Composition at Oklahoma State University. She earned her Ph.D. in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric and Women and Gender Studies at Syracuse University.

Lauryn Massenburg is a graduate of the University of North Carolina Charlotte where she majored in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She currently attends the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, with a concentration in Screenwriting.

S. F. Means, Ph.D. is a 2012 graduate of Spelman College and 2018 graduate of the University of Kentucky. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. A native of Newark, New Jersey, she currently lives and works in the U.S. Southwest with her husband, Juan, and dog, Toast.

Nicole D. Sconiers experiments with speculative fiction, sci-fi, and horror, centering complex black heroines. Her work has appeared in *Nightmare*, *Lightspeed*, *Speculative City*, *NIGHTLIGHT*, *PodCastle*, *Lucky Jefferson*, and other publications. Her stories appeared in the anthologies *Black from the Future*, *December Tales*, and *Sycorax's Daughters*. She was a Bram Stoker Award finalist.

Cheryl Whitehead's poems have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Hotel America*, and other journals. Her chapbook, *So Ghosts Might Stop Composing*, was published in August 2019. She has won an emerging artist grant from the Astraea Foundation.

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Toni Ann Johnson won the 2021 Flannery O'Connor Award for short fiction with her linked story collection *Light Skin Gone to Waste*, forthcoming from University of Georgia Press in October 2022. Johnson is an NAACP Image Award nominee for Outstanding Literary Work for her debut novel, *Remedy For a Broken Angel* (Nortia Press, 2014). A novella, *Homegoing*, won Accents Publishing's inaugural novella contest in 2020 and was published in May 2021. Johnson recently won the *Missouri Review's* Miller Audio Prize for prose with her short story "Time Travel." She currently teaches fiction and screenwriting at Antioch University Los Angeles.

Elizabeth Fulton is an emerging writer with an interest in creative fiction, dramatic writing, poetry, and cultural criticism. Her work delves into universal emotions from the perspective of a young African American woman. She pursues her craft as an undergraduate student at Emory University.

Valerie A. Smith, a student of poetry in the Ph.D. program at Georgia State University, writes on behalf of the voiceless. She earned her masters at Kennesaw State University where she is currently a Lecturer of English. Above all, she values spending quality time with her family.

Kennedy Dunning is a senior Documentary Filmmaking major and Comparative Women's Studies minor at Spelman College. She directs documentaries and narratives in expository or poetic styles. Her subjects explore girlhood, isolation, imagination, and more.

Radcliffe Bailey is an Atlanta-based painter, sculptor, and mixed media artist who utilizes the layering of imagery, culturally resonant materials, and text to explore themes of ancestry, race, migration, and collective memory. His work often incorporates found materials and objects from his past into textured compositions, including traditional African sculpture, tintypes of his family members, ships, train tracks, and Georgia red clay. The cultural significance and rhythmic properties of music are also important influences that can be seen throughout his oeuvre.

An iconic work of Bailey's, *Windward Coast—West Coast Slave Trade*, is composed of hundreds of discarded piano keys. This piece expresses his love of music, as well as the history, culture, and spirituality contained in song. The undulating keys are arranged to resemble the turbulent waters of Middle Passage. The waters of this work are physically embodied by music, an intangible entity carried over to new worlds and a trans-generational vestige of African heritages.

Individual experience serves as a departure point in Bailey's quest to excavate the collective consciousness of African diasporas and regional American identities. Found objects and imagery present seemingly bygone pasts as contemporary, neon Northern Stars that lead us through Bailey's constellation of works, exploring and interweaving our shared histories. Often quilt-like

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in aesthetic, his practice creates links between diasporic histories and potential futures, investigating the evolution or stagnation of notions of identity.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Ascents and Echoes* at Jack Shainman Gallery, and *Travelogue* at Jack Shainman Gallery | The School, Kinderhook, New York, which will travel to the Knoxville Museum of Art, Tennessee; *Pensive*, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia, which traveled to the Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, South Carolina; *Radcliffe Bailey: Recent Works*, Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans; and *Memory as Medicine* at the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Bailey's work is included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri; the Denver Art Museum; and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, among many others.

Ariana Benson was born in Norfolk, Virginia. She received the 2022 Furious Flower Poetry Prize and the 2021 *Porter House Review* Poetry Prize. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *POETRY*, *Copper Nickel*, *Colorado Review*, and elsewhere. She is the 2022 Eliza Moore Fellow for Artistic Excellence at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation.

Krista Franklin is a writer, performer, and visual artist, the author *Too Much Midnight* (Haymarket Books, 2020), the artist book *Under the Knife* (Candor Arts, 2018), and the chapbook *Study of Love & Black Body* (Willow Books, 2012). She is a recipient of the Helen and Tim Meier Foundation for the Arts Achievement Award and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. Her visual art has been exhibited at DePaul Art Museum, Poetry Foundation, Konsthall C, Rootwork Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Studio Museum in Harlem, Chicago Cultural Center, National Museum of Mexican Art, and on television. She is published in *Poetry*, *Black Camera*, *The Offing*, *Vinyl*, and a number of anthologies and artist books.

Dr. Tara Betts is the author of *Refuse to Disappear*, *Break the Habit*, and *Arc & Hue*. In addition to her work as a teaching artist and mentor for young poets, she has taught at Rutgers University and University of Illinois-Chicago, and at Stateville Prison via the Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project. She is the Inaugural Poet for the People Practitioner Fellow at University of Chicago. Betts currently teaches at DePaul University and serves as poetry editor at *The Langston Hughes Review*. She is also founder of the nonprofit organization The Whirlwind Learning Center on Chicago's South Side.

Fallon Wilson was born a mixed media digital artist. She uses black cultural stories, digital collaging, and moving pictures to tell stories of black people.

Tamara Madison is an MFA graduate of New England College and an Anaphora Arts (an organization that promotes writers of color) fellow. Her creative and critical works have been published in various anthologies, journals, and magazines including *Poetry International*, *MER*

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(*Mom Egg Review*), *Tidal Basin Review*, *Web Del Sol Review of Books*, and *Tea Party Magazine*. She is a contributing editor to *aaduna*, an online journal of words and images, and an English and Creative Writing instructor at Valencia College. She is also the creator and host of *BREAKDOWN: The Poet & The Poems*, a poetry conversation series on YouTube. Her most recent poetry collection is *Threed, This Road Not Damascus* (Trio House Press).

Yona Harvey is an American poet and recipient of the Kate Tufts Discovery Award for her first poetry collection, *Hemming the Water*. She is among the first Black women to write for Marvel Comics since the company's founding in 1939 and the first Black woman to write for the Marvel character Storm. She facilitates creative writing workshops, delivers writing-specific speaker topics, and has worked with teenagers writing about mental health issues in collaboration with *Creative Nonfiction* magazine. Her website is yonaharvey.com.

Rochelle Spencer is author of *AfroSurrealism: The African Diaspora's Surrealist Fiction* (Routledge, 2019) and co-editor, with Jina Ortiz, of *All About Skin: Short Fiction by Women of Color* (University of Wisconsin, 2014). She is an alumna of the Clarion West Workshop (taught by K. Tempest Bradford and Nisi Shawl) and VONA, a former board member of the Hurston Wright Foundation, and a current member of the National Book Critics Circle. She teaches themed composition courses, including "The Black Utopia," at Fisk University, and "AfroSurrealism" in the graduate creative writing program in Sarah Lawrence College's speculative fiction track.

brittney ray crowell, is a 2007 graduate of Spelman College and a recipient of the Donald Barthelme Prize in Poetry and the Lucy Terry Prince Prize. Her poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Frontier*, *The Common*, *Hobart*, and elsewhere, while her collage work has appeared in *The West Review*. She recently participated as one of the librettists for the Kennedy Center's Cartography Project. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Houston.

Waladi Ali is a native of Denver, Colorado and a graduate of Morehouse College with a B.A. in Art. His main mediums are pencil/paper, watercolor, acrylic paint, and digital media/graphic design. He has produced two ongoing Webcomic books, "Justice Rain" and "Heart & Brain."

Dr. Len Lawson is the author of *Negro Asylum for the Lunatic Insane* (Main Street Rag, 2023), *Chime* (Get Fresh Books, 2019), and the chapbook *Before the Night Wakes You* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). He is also co-editor of *The Future of Black: Afrofuturism, Black Comics, and Superhero Poetry* (Blair Press, 2021) and *Hand in Hand: Poets Respond to Race* (Muddy Ford Press, 2017).

Christiana McClain is a black queer writer from Houston, Texas. Her work has been published in *So To Speak*, *Fearsome Critters*, and *Remapping Wonderland: Classic Fairytales Retold by People of Color*.

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Madison McCaskey is a 24-year-old writer from Birmingham, Alabama, and a graduate of Spelman College. Currently pursuing a M.F.A. in Creative Writing at the City College of New York, she is committed to telling raw, emotional coming-of-age stories about young women. When not writing Madison enjoys photography, food, and messy reality TV.

V Efua Prince is a professor of African American Studies at Wayne State University whose writing often takes an interdisciplinary form as history, poetry, drama, and performance, in order to transform the history of black women into political art. She is the author of “Burnin’ Down the House,” “Daughter’s Exchange,” *Waterbearers* (a play produced by the National Women’s Theatre Festival’s Occupy the Stage 2022), and numerous other scholarly and creative works.

Dr. R. Nicole Smith is a senior lecturer at Spelman College who researches and publishes on Womanism, Black speculative fiction, and Afrofuturism.

Cornelius Eady is the author of several books of poetry, including the critically-acclaimed *Hardheaded Weather*, which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award, *Victims of the Latest Dance Craze*, winner of the 1985 Lamont Prize from the Academy of American Poets, *The Gathering of My Name*, which was nominated for the 1992 Pulitzer Prize, and his most recent collection *The War Against the Obvious*. He is the recipient of an NEA Fellowship in Literature, a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry, a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to Bellagio, Italy, and *The Prairie Schooner* Strousse Award. With poet Toi Derricote, Eady is cofounder of Cave Canem, a national organization for African American poetry and poets offering regional workshops, readings, book prizes, and summer retreats, and acting as a safe space for intellectual engagement and critical debate. He is also a songwriter who performs with his acoustic Trio. Eady’s songs tell the story of passing time, the Black American experience, and the blues in the style of Folk & Americana music.

Ifé Franklin’s practice involves several genres of art-making inspired by slave narratives, dreams, dance, song, and visions. Over the last decade she has been developing The Indigo Project which honors the lives and history of formerly enslaved Africans/African-Americans who labored to produce materials that generated the wealth of nations. At the center are Franklin’s Ancestor Slave Cabins which often incorporate Adire fabric, an indigo-dyed cotton cloth decorated using a resist technique from the Yoruba culture. These assemblages are built in collaboration with the community and cultivate connections that promote understanding and healing from the hard history of enslavement. In 2018 Franklin published *The Slave Narrative of Willie Mae*, a fictional account of her great-grandmother’s escape from slavery to freedom. The work was adapted into a short film in 2021.

Franklin’s work has been exhibited at The Slave Dwellings Project in South Carolina, the North Charleston Arts Festival, and throughout the Boston area including, Medicine Wheel Productions, Villa Victoria, The Eliot School of Applied Arts, Franklin Park, and the Royall House

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and Slave Quarters. Her work is in the permanent collection of The Fitchburg Museum of Art in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, University of Massachusetts Boston, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C. In 2017 Franklin was awarded The Creative City Grant by the New England Foundation for the Arts. Originally from Washington D.C, she graduated from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and has lived and worked in Roxbury, Massachusetts for many years.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs describes herself as “a Queer Black Troublemaker and Black Feminist Love Evangelist and an aspirational cousin to all sentient beings.” She is co-founder of Brilliance Remastered, an online network and series of retreats and online intensives serving community-accountable intellectuals and artists in the legacies of Audre Lorde’s profound statement in “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” that the preceding statement is “only threatening to those...who still think of the master’s house as their only source of support.” She is also a co-founder member of UBUNTU A Women of Color Survivor-Led Coalition to End Gendered Violence; Warrior Healers Organizing Trust; and Earthseed Land Collective in Durham, North Carolina; a member of the first visioning council of Kindred Southern Healing Justice Network; and a participant in Southerners on New Ground, Allied Media Projects, Black Women’s Blueprint, and the International Black Youth Summit for more than a decade.

Alexis has transformed the scope of intellectual, creative and oracular writing with her triptych of experimental works published by Duke University Press—*Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity* (2016), *M Archive: After the End of the World* (2018), and *Dub: Finding Ceremony* (2020). Her poetry and fiction appears in many journals and has been included in *The Best American Experimental Writing*, and she has been honored with a Pushcart Prize nomination, the Lucille Clifton Poetry Prize, and the Firefly Ridge Women of Color Award. She has been poet-in-residence at *make/shift* magazine and is currently Creative Writing Editor at *Feminist Studies*. Her most recent book *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, part of adrienne maree brown’s Emergent Strategy Series at AK Press, won the 2022 Whiting Award in Nonfiction. Alexis was a 2020-2021 National Humanities Center Fellow, funded by the Founders Award, and is a 2022 National Endowment of the Arts Creative Writing Fellow. She is currently working on her next book, *The Eternal Life of Audre Lorde* (forthcoming from Farrar, Straus, and Giroux).

Nalani Dowling (videographer) is a graduate of Spelman College, where she majored in studio art with a minor in creative writing. She is a student in the M.F.A. program in Film, Television, and Digital Media at the University of Georgia.

Tyler Ryan is currently studying English and Philosophy at Spelman College. She enjoys writing short stories and poetry in her spare time.

Abigail Gordon is an artist based in Atlanta, Georgia, with a B.A. degree from Spelman College.

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Danielle "Danni" Bens graduated from Spelman College in 2021 with a B.A. in English. She has started her career in scholarly publishing at the University of Texas Press as a marketing and sales assistant, where she continues to develop her interest in the written word.