

# AUNT CHLOE

## A Journal of Artful Candor

### CONTRIBUTORS' BIOS (2021 issue)

**Ariana Benson** is from Chesapeake, Virginia. She received the 2021 Graybeal Gowen prize and was a finalist for the 2021 Pink Poetry Prize. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Obsidian*, *West Branch*, *Shenandoah*, *Great River Review*, *Auburn Avenue* (where she serves as Nonfiction Editor), and elsewhere. Through her writing, she strives to fashion vignettes of Blackness that speak to its infinite depth and richness.

**Nydia Blas**, who grew up in Ithaca, New York, received a BS degree from Ithaca College and MFA from Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts. She currently lives in Atlanta where she is an assistant professor in the department of Art and Visual Culture at Spelman College. Her photographs have been commissioned by *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Washington Post*, among other publications. Her work has also been featured in several publications, including *Mfon: A Journal of Women Photographers of the African Diaspora*, *The Huffington Post*, *The NYTimes Style Magazine*, *Time*, *Refinery 29*, and *Frames Magazine*. She has completed artist residencies at Constance Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts and The Center for Photography at Woodstock.

Nydia uses photography, collage, video, and books to address matters of sexuality, intimacy, and her lived experience as a girl, woman, and mother, weaving stories concerning circumstance, value, and power to create a physical and allegorical space presented through a Black feminine lens. The result is an environment that is dependent upon the belief that in order to maintain resiliency a magical outlook is necessary.

Nydia is especially recognized for her work, *The Girls Who Spun Gold*—a collection of images that resulted from the Girls Empowerment Group that Blas founded after observing a lack of space and community for teen girls of African descent in Ithaca, New York. In 2019, she was named "One to Watch" by the *British Journal of Photography*, and she was one of twelve participants for The World Press Photo Foundation's 26th edition of the Joop Swart Masterclass. In 2020 she was named on the Lit List, and in 2021, the Silver List.

Composer and pianist **Courtney Bryan** is the Albert and Linda Mintz Professor of Music at Newcomb College in the School of Liberal Arts, Tulane University. She is also a Creative Partner with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. She has received the 2018 Herb Alpert Award in the Arts (for music) and the 2019-20 Samuel Barber Rome Prize in Music Composition, and she has been selected as a 2018 Hermitage Fellow, a 2020 United States Artists Fellow, and a 2020-21 Civitella Ranieri Fellow.

**Nikky Finney** was born by the sea in South Carolina and raised during the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Arts Movements. She has been a faculty member at Cave Canem summer workshop for African American poets; a founding member of the Affrilachian Poets, a particular place for poets of color in Appalachia; poet and professor for twenty-three years at the University of Kentucky; and visiting professor at Berea and Smith Colleges. She won the PEN

American Open Book Award in 1996 and the Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Award for the Arts in South Carolina in 2016. She edited *Black Poets Lean South*, a Cave Canem anthology (2007), and authored *On Wings Made of Gauze* (1985), *Rice* (1995), *Heartwood* (1997), *The World Is Round* (2003), and *Head Off & Split*, winner of the 2011 National Book Award for Poetry. Her acceptance speech has become a thing of legend, described by the 2011 NBA host, John Lithgow, as "the best acceptance speech ever—for anything." Her most recent collection of poems, *Love Child's Occasional Hotbed of Poetry* (2020) was a finalist for *The L.A. Times* Book Award.

In her home state she involves herself in the day-to-day battles for truth and justice while also guiding both undergraduates and MFA students at the University of South Carolina where she is the John H. Bennett, Jr., Chair in Creative Writing and Southern Letters, with appointments in both the Department of English Language and Literature and the African American Studies Program, which she proudly notes is forty-six years strong. Finney is the recipient of the Aiken Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry from the University of the South and the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets. Nikky Finney's work, in book form and video, including her now legendary acceptance speech, is on display in the inaugural exhibition of the African American Museum of History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

**Namina Forna** is a young adult novelist based in Los Angeles. Originally from Sierra Leone, West Africa, she moved to the United States when she was nine and has been traveling back and forth ever since. Namina, who loves telling stories with fierce female leads and also works as a screenwriter, is author of *The New York Times* best-selling epic fantasy novel, *The Gilded Ones*, and the forthcoming sequel, *The Merciless Ones*.

**Kennard Garrett** is an Emmy-nominated, award-winning record producer, composer, and arranger. He has produced and received musician/arranger credit on numerous chart-topping songs for various artists—from the PussyCat Dolls, Jesse McCartney, and Korean pop star BoA to R&B singer Case, and rappers J. Cole and Drake.

Kennard produced "Don't Make Me Wait," the lead single on the collaborative album *44/876* by international superstars Sting and Shaggy, which spent 19 weeks at No. 1 on *Billboard*, and won Best Reggae Album honors at the 61st GRAMMY Awards in February 2019. In 2020, Kennard, along with award-winning producer Justin "Henny" Henderson, developed the music app "House Mark 1." Within the first week of its release, it was the No. 1 music app and the No. 4 paid app overall in the App Store.

Kennard Garrett serves as a national trustee for the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (GRAMMYS) and is a member of the Producers and Engineers wing and the Songwriters wing. A graduate of Morehouse College and Georgia Tech, he is also an adjunct professor at Morehouse College.

**Mikki K. Harris** is a multimedia artist whose work over the past 20 years has focused on community-based power as examined through the tools of journalism and cultural studies. She

uses storytelling to shift perspective in dynamic ways that both preserve and carry culture. She uses oral history, documentary photojournalism and video, as well as writing, to document and shape impactful stories. Her current work focuses on the fight against ecocide and cultural erasure on the island of Barbuda.

A photojournalist by training—with undergraduate and graduate degrees in Economics and Journalism from Spelman College and Boston University, respectively—Mikki has served as a Visual Journalism Fellow at the Poynter Institute and has worked as a photojournalist for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *USA Today* and the *Newark Star-Ledger*. She has photographed six of the past eight U.S. presidents; two of her images illustrating life in Harlem were exhibited at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2005; and her images of the National Urban League are a part of Google's Arts and Culture digital exhibit. Also, two student-produced magazines which she taught visuals for and edited won the Robert F. Kennedy Award.

Mikki became a certified drone pilot in 2019, and co-founded the Atlanta Drone Lab while in her current role as senior assistant professor of Journalism at Morehouse College.

**Anthony J. Hunter**, a native of College Park, Georgia, is a junior Finance major at Morehouse College. He describes himself as a world traveler, film producer, entrepreneur, and artist in multiple disciplines who hopes to help communities develop globally through art and service.

**Deandra Jackson** is a 2020 graduate of Spelman College who is currently pursuing the MFA in Poetry at Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has appeared in the anthology *Beyond the Sea: Rhapsody* by Eber & Wein Publishing.

Detroit-bred-and-based fine artist, muralist, and 2017 Kresge Fellow **Sydney G. James** earned her BFA at the College for Creative Studies in 2001, and began her career as an art director in advertising. She then headed to Los Angeles in 2004 to expand her career as a visual artist in the film and television industry, and earned her master's degree in Secondary Education. Since returning to Detroit in 2011, Sydney has become one of the leading creative voices in southeast Michigan. Exploring themes of the racial and gender positioning of the Black woman in America as “last” or “least among others” in society has been the central theme in Sydney's work recently.

Sydney has displayed her art at MoCAD, the Charles H. Wright Museum, Inner State Gallery, PlayGround Detroit Gallery, Collective Detroit Gallery, Detroit Artist Market, Red Bull House of Art, and Janice Charach galleries, as well as in the “Arts, Beats and Lyrics” traveling exhibit. She has completed public murals in Detroit for the 2015-2018 Murals in the Market (recognized by *National Geographic* magazine as one of the world's best), New Orleans, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Pow Wow Hawaii, Pow Wow Long Beach, Pow Wow Worcester, and Accra, Ghana, Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Kathmandu, Nepal. Some of her most recent work has been as a branding agent partnering with the Ford Motor Company for the 2019 *Essence* Fest, as well as being one of the faces of the Lip Bar brand of cosmetics.

**Toni Ann Johnson's** essays and short fiction have appeared in *The Los Angeles Times*, *Coachella Review*, *Callaloo*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Xavier Review*, and elsewhere. Johnson's novel *Remedy for a Broken Angel* (2014) was nominated for a 2015 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work by a Debut Author, and *Homegoing* won Accents Publishing's inaugural novella contest and was published in May 2021.

**Briana Luckey** is a hobbyist and artist from Columbia, South Carolina, who has been drawing for her entire life. She currently works as an electrical engineer in Savannah, Georgia.

**Sequoia Maner** is a poet and assistant professor of English at Spelman College. She is co-editor of the book *Revisiting the Elegy in the Black Lives Matter Era* (Routledge) and author of *Little Girl Blue: Poems* (Host Publications) and *To Pimp a Butterfly* (33 1/3). Her poems and scholarly articles have been published in *Obsidian*, the *Feminist Wire*, *Meridians*, *The Langston Hughes Review*, *Auburn Avenue*, and elsewhere.

**Tangela Mitchell** (she/her/hers) is a North Carolina-born poet and collage artist. Currently based in Harlem, NY, she is pursuing an MFA in Poetry at Sarah Lawrence College.

**Nijla Mu'min** is a writer and filmmaker from the East Bay Area whose work is informed by poetry, photography, fiction, and dance. She is a 2007 graduate of UC Berkeley, where she studied in June Jordan's Poetry for the People program, and a 2013 graduate of CalArts MFA film directing and creative writing programs. Named one of [25 New Faces of Independent Film by Filmmaker Magazine in 2017](#), she tells stories about Black girls and women who find themselves between worlds and identities. In 2014, she was selected for the Sundance Institute Screenwriters Intensive and she received the Grand Jury Prize for Best Screenplay at the 2014 Urbanworld Film Festival, for her script "Noor." Her debut feature film, *Jinn*, premiered at the 2018 South By Southwest Film Festival, where it won the Special Jury Recognition Award for Screenwriting. *Jinn*, [a New York Times Critics' pick](#), was released in November 2018 by Orion Classics, and is currently streaming on Amazon. In 2018, Nijla directed an episode of the critically-acclaimed series *Queen Sugar*; in 2019, an episode of HBO's *Insecure*; and, in 2021, an episode of *Wu-Tang: An American Saga* on Hulu. She has also written for the upcoming Apple series, *Swagger*, and the Starz show *Blindspotting*. She recently directed a short film, *Black Prom*, for Netflix. Currently, she is developing her second feature film, *Mosswood Park*, as well as a debut collection of poetry and essays. In 2019, Nijla joined the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

**Valerie A. Smith** speaks on behalf of those who do not have a voice. Poetry is her highest form of expression. Smith earned the MA in Professional Writing at Kennesaw State University where she is now a lecturer of English. She is currently completing the PhD in Poetry at Georgia State University. Above all, she values spending quality time with her family.

"My preference for 35mm film photography combined with my love of people and the concept of reality pushes my (many) series," says **Elyse Spencer**, a junior at Spelman College from Rochester, New York, who is also known by the artist name "svnflwrchild."

**Tyler Ryan** is currently pursuing a degree in English with a minor in Philosophy at Spelman College. She enjoys writing short stories and poetry in her spare time.

**Jasmine Tabor** (they/them + tw: @poetjasmi), a Black queer poet from the deep South, is a 2021 graduate of Spelman College where they were a Mellon Mays Fellow and the recipient of the Edith A. Hambie Poetry Prize. Their work has appeared in the Agnes Scott Writers' Festival journal, in *Abolition Feminism*, and *Stellium* literary magazine, and is forthcoming on the Academy of American Poets website ([www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org)). Jasmine is also a 2024 candidate for the MFA in Poetry at Syracuse University.