

JANUARY



Olga Yukhno

Spring 2023
Volume 11 Issue 1



Music and the Public Good

The University of South Carolina School of Music is a cultural and educational center of excellence

Discover a vibrant mix of concerts and recitals featuring our students, faculty and guest artists. From awe-inspiring performances by the **USC Symphony Orchestra**, **USC Wind Ensemble**, **Opera at USC** and the **Choirs of Carolina** to the contemporary sounds of **USC Percussion Ensemble**, woodwind and jazz ensembles like **The Left Bank Big Band**, a diverse collection of public performances await.

And, we have opportunities for you to make music with us through our **Music for Life** programs.

The **Center for Piano Studies** provides excellent piano instruction, from age 5 to all ages of adults, and at any level, from beginners to advanced players.

Carolina Music Studios offers a variety of group classes and private lesson opportunities in brass, guitar, percussion, strings, voice and woodwinds. The **USC String Project** offers instruction on violin, viola, cello and bass for adults as well as children in 3rd through 5th grade.

Music Play classes at the **Children's Music Development Center** are part of an innovative program designed to develop the music potential of children from newborns to three-year-olds.

Carolina LifeSong Initiative is especially for students with cognitive disabilities.

If you're age 50 or older, you can come participate as an instrumentalist through our **Congaree New Horizons Band Program**. It's never too late to learn!



School of Music

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

sc.edu/music



23 FUEL YOUR
24 imagination

THE 23|24 MASTERWORKS SEASON



**The Rose
of Sonora**

OCTOBER 7, 2023

Rachmaninoff 150

NOVEMBER 17, 2023

Beethoven & Blue Jeans

JANUARY 13, 2024

American Rhapsody

FEBRUARY 24, 2024

Wolfgang & Wine

MARCH 23, 2024

The Art of Symphony

APRIL 27, 2024



SOUTH CAROLINA

Philharmonic

MORIHICO NAKAHARA • MUSIC DIRECTOR

Subscribe Today

SCPHILHARMONIC.COM

- 8 KATIE LEITNER
- 10 JESSICA FICHTER
- 12 BECCI ROBBINS
- 16 ALYSSA STEWART
- 19 ART AT THE KOGER CENTER
- 22 DRINK SMALL & CLAIR DELUNE
- 24 IVAN SEGURA
- 26 CENTERFOLD:
PHILIP MULLEN
- 36 BOHUMILA AUGUSTINOVA
- 39 DICK MOONS
- 42 POEMS BY NICHOLSON & LAWSON
- 44 OLGA YUKHNO (COVER)
- 46 REVIEW - A POOKA IN ARKANSAS
- 48 REVIEW - HOUSE IN NEED OF MOORING
- 50 RADICAL CAROLINA
- 52 JENNIFER BARTELL BOYKIN
- 54 POETRY SOCIETY OF SC
- 58 THREE COLLECTIONS OF POETRY
- 54 JASPER GALLERIES

CENTERFOLD / PHILIP MULLEN



44 On the Cover
OLGA YUKHNO

50 Radical Carolina

CONTRIBUTORS

SEAN RAYFORD • BETSY NEWMAN
 ALYSSA STEWART • SHANNON IVEY
 EMILY MOFFITT • JADA MACK
 EVELYN BERRY • RUTH NICHOLS
 LEN LAWSON • GINNY MERETT
 JARED JOHNSON • ZACH MUELLER
 RANDY SPENCER

JASPER IS

CYNTHIA BOITER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF • KRISTINE HARTVIGSEN ASSOCIATE EDITOR •
 BRIAN HARMON ART DIRECTOR • WADE SELLERS FILM EDITOR •
 KEVIN OLIVER MUSIC EDITOR • ED MADDEN POETRY EDITOR •
 LIBBY CAMPBELL THEATRE EDITOR •
 CHRISTINA XAN DANCE EDITOR



Welcome to our spring 2023 issue of Jasper Magazine! During this time of cultural instability, it is a joy to immerse oneself in the goodness and progressivism of art. While the news is a constantly frustrating loop flooding our senses with disingenuity and corruption, I find it so satisfying to focus on our friends and colleagues who are constantly working to find portals of enlightenment via their artistic talents. It is both edifying and personally validating to be able to share their stories with you, Jasper's readers and supporters, as well as to join with you in celebrating the intellectual and spiritual gifts they give us.

This issue of Jasper celebrates one specific treasure who, after having shown his work predominantly in nucleuses of arts like New York City and Las Angeles for decades, is now focusing on his role in his home-base community of Columbia—Philip Mullen. I had the humble pleasure of studying Mullen's art, once again, in his home studio. Mullen took the time to share his process with me and demonstrate his methodology with incredibly educational tools—selections from his own collection of paintings. In so doing, he opened another visual facility for me and taught me how to look into, rather than at his paintings. I hope when you read our article on Mullen you, too, will enjoy this new-found pleasure.

We also celebrate a pair of 3-D visual artists, Bohumila Augustinova and Olga Yukhno, both eastern European transplants who now call Columbia home. Without fail, every time I see new work by either of these women, I am overwhelmed by their creativity and precision.

With this issue we also congratulate our city's new poet laureate, Jennifer Bartell Boykin, a former Jasper Project board member who is stepping into the position of city poet laureate after Jasper poetry editor Ed Madden served his two successful terms. Bartell Boykin has already made her mark on the post by reaching out

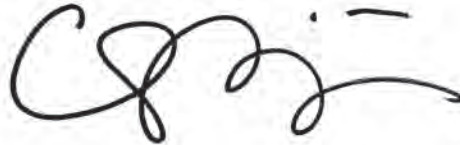
to Midlands' youth and adults alike. As established a poet as Bartell Boykin is, we also have the pleasure of introducing readers to a new poet whose talent has us enamored, Alyssa Stewart. Congratulations, Alyssa, we're publishing your first poem!

I'm also delighted to include a story about a young woman we've been watching with wonder for the past few years. Katie Leitner is the kind of multi-faceted talent who could find a home on the great stages of the world as an actor, vocalist, musician, or songwriter, if she could solve the long-standing riddle of how to be in the right place at the right time. How lovely that we have her here with us until that happens though, raising the bar for theatre and music with every new project she takes on.

Thank you for reading Jasper Magazine and continuing to support the Jasper Project. We are a busy bunch of working board members with a passion for art and a devotion to our community. Please enjoy all the talented energy we've recorded for posterity with this issue, and please consider joining the Jasper Guild so we can keep Jasper free. The door is open—we're just waiting for you to come on in.

Until next issue—

Take care,



THE JASPER PROJECT //

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cindi Boiter **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** · Wade Sellers **PRESIDENT**

Kristin Cobb **VICE PRESIDENT** · Emily Moffitt **SECRETARY** · Christina Xan **TREASURER &**

GALLERIES MANAGER · Bekah Rice **DIGITAL EDITOR & OPERATIONS MANAGER**

Al Black · Bert Easter · Laura Garner Hine · Len Lawson · Paul Leo · Kimber Carpenter · Jon Tuttle · Ebony Wilson · Libby Campbell

The Jasper Project is a project-oriented, multidisciplinary arts facilitator serving the greater Columbia and South Carolina communities by providing collaborative arts engineering and providing community-wide arts communication. Jasper Magazine is dedicated to the promotion and support of Columbia, SC artists and arts lovers. Jasper Magazine is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in any manner without the publisher's written consent.

Jasper//

*as in Johns, the abstract expressionist, neo-Dadaist artist
as in Sergeant, the Revolutionary War hero
as in Mineral, the spotted or speckled stone
as in Magazine, the Word on Columbia Arts*

SPRING 2023 / VOLUME 011 / ISSUE 001

THE
JASPER GUILD

CHAMPION

BILL SCHMIDT · JANE ZENGER
JACK & DORA ANN MCKENZIE

ADVOCATE

MALISSA BURNETTE · JOHN CASEY
CATHERINE LILLY · RANDY SPENCER
LAURIE & DUNCAN MCINTOSH

ALLY

TOM & MARGARET-ANN ASHBURN · DEBORAH BILLINGS · AL BLACK
CINDI BOITER & BOB JOLLEY · CHRISTOPHER ROSE · MARK CORUM
CLARK ELLEFSON · DIANE HARE · REBECCA HORNE · EILEEN BLYTH
FRANCES MOFFITT · RICHARD MOONS · MIMS CAVE RUST
JON TUTTLE · CHRISTINA XAN

FRIEND

PHILLIP BUSH · KAREN CADDELL · RUTH NICHOLSON · REBECCA HUNTER
CARLA DAMRON · DEBBIE DANIEL & JACK MCGREGOR · TISH LOWE
LISA HAMMOND · JOSEPH KENDRICK · TERRI MCLAUGHLIN
BEKAH RICE & ADAM CORBETT · WADE SELLERS · AUDRY JONES
MICHAEL SHEPARD · ARTHUR TURFA · GILLIAN ALBRECHT

ARTIST PEER

CANDACE CATOE · WILMA R. KING · KIMBERLY CASE · KIMBER CARPENTER
PASCALE BILGIS · JJ BURTON · JENYFER CONAWAY · PAT GILLAM
RON HAGELL · GINNY MERETT · HOLLY RAUCH · POTLICK
SHARON FUNDERBURK · JEAN LOMASTO · CLARK WATSON



FIND YOUR SUPER POWERS.

JASPER GUILD

JASPERPROJECT.ORG

New Guild Memberships and Renewals are now tax deductible!

At the Jasper Project, we're working harder than ever to keep Jasper Magazine free and available to anyone who wants to read it. We realize a lot of you hold on to Jasper, too, and that's why it's important that we create a piece of literary art that is beautiful, informative, and an archival and interpretive narrative of the SC Midlands arts culture. The magazine you hold in your hand costs between \$12 and \$15 to produce, and that's without compensating editors or staff. This is almost double what it cost before the pandemic. If you believe in Jasper and our mission to nurture, promote, and celebrate SC arts in all its forms, please consider becoming part of the answer to how we continue to keep Jasper free by joining the guild at whatever level you can afford. Thank you!

FRIEND

1 YEAR DELIVERY OF JASPER TO YOUR HOME, UPON YOUR REQUEST, YOUR NAME LISTED IN JASPER MAGAZINE FOR 1 YEAR - \$50

ALLY

THE ABOVE + YOUR NAME IN LARGE LETTERS - \$100

ADVOCATE

THE ABOVE + FREE ADMISSION TO THE 2023 - 2024 JASPER EVENT OF YOUR CHOICE - \$250

CHAMPION

ALL THE ABOVE - \$500

HERO

THE ABOVE + A COLUMBIAARTS SCENE BONUS PACK WITH TICKETS, PASSES, BOOKS, & MORE! - \$1000

ARTIST PEER

PRACTICING ARTISTS ARE INVITED TO JOIN THE JASPER GUILD AND SEE YOUR NAME IN JASPER MAGAZINE - \$25

KATIE LEITNER

Columbia's Renaissance Woman



By Kevin Oliver
Photos by Sean Rayford

The term “Renaissance Man” gets bandied about, almost too freely, for multitalented creative men; I’ll posit that Columbia actress and musician Katie Leitner easily qualifies as a “Renaissance Woman.” She has been a principal at Trustus Theatre since graduating from high school, works days as a private music teacher and at Freeway Music, and is a member of the local band Say Femme. Her latest endeavor has been to take on the role of directing, not just acting, something she says she’d love to do more.

“The last acting I did was in *Rocky Horror*,” Leitner recalls in a recent conversation. “After that, I served as assistant director with Dewey Scott-Wiley on *First Date*, and then when Robin Gottlieb was supposed to direct *The Mad Ones*, she asked me to co-direct.”

Getting some experience in the director’s role without being completely in charge made it a confidence-building experience, Leitner says.

“I’m glad I didn’t have to do it all on my own starting out,” she admits. “But I love directing, and I do want to have a show on my own soon.”

Leitner’s first show with Trustus was in 2009, when she appeared in a production of the musical *Rent* while she was at USC studying music education. After graduation she entered a short period as an educator in Virginia before moving back to the Columbia area to teach at Lugoff-Elgin Middle School.

“I was already missing the theater scene, and Trustus, when Chad Henderson called to see if I would come back and do a show,” Leitner says. “When I moved back, they were doing *American Idiot*. It was then that I realized public school wasn’t for me—I loved the teaching but not the rest of the things that went with it, that sucked the joy out of it.”

It's no accident that most of what Leitner has done at Trustus has been musical in nature. In addition to the teaching career, she exercises her musical side even more with the local trio Say Femme, an idiosyncratic rock ensemble that also includes Desiree Richardson and Max Harrison. Their 2019 EP *Souvenirs* was recorded at Jam Room Studios by Zach Thomas with Brendan Bull sitting in on drums. The brief set showcases Leitner and Richardson's vocal interplay, which could easily be described as theatrical.

"I'm an actor, but I've done mostly musicals," Leitner says. "The music side of that definitely bleeds into the band. We've even discussed doing something with it on stage, combining the two disciplines."

There is a separation for Leitner between making music on a theater stage and in a rock band, however.

"It lights up my brain in a different way, even as it melds together," She explains. "I write most of what we do for Say Femme, but I wouldn't be able to do it without Max and Desiree as sounding boards—I take it to them at the editing part of it, because I have a hard time deciding which direction to take things sometimes." It is a group effort from that point, she adds.

"I have no ego about it, so if they say 'that's lame,' I trust them implicitly," Leitner says. "They write their own harmonies, too."

Leitner's writing style takes her theatrical background and applies it to four-minute storytelling framed by insistent melodies.

"I like to write songs from different people's perspectives, not just my own," Leitner says. "That comes from playing characters. Sometimes they are authentic to me, other times I just connect to what the character is going through."

The latest Say Femme release was only a single, the piano-driven "Goodnight Rockstar," released in December of 2022, but it advances the band into a sound that's reminiscent of the arena-filling grandiosity of Queen or David Bowie, foreshadowing future possibilities.

"I'd love to do a full album, but it takes a long time to finance that, and also to get six or seven adults in a room together," Leitner says. "I'm lucky to have their attention when they do—we took a long break but are trying to get back to being an active band with some upcoming gigs.

We'll probably be releasing singles as we are able, until we have enough for something longer to come out."

Leitner also lets slip that she's sitting on yet another creative outlet, a solo collection of songs she wrote outside of everything else she's done.

"I have some songs I've written that I'd call pop country music that haven't seen the light of day," Leitner reveals. "I've been working on recording them with Cory Plough, who has been asking me when I'm going to put them out and I honestly don't know. It's different for me, more of a country persona."

For now, Leitner is intent on continuing to grow within her existing framework, especially at Trustus.

"I don't know what my life would be without it," She says of the theater and its acting company. "It's an integral part of who I am, it's my community. There are so many talented people here, and amazing new people, too. We had four new faces on the stage for 'The Mad Ones,' that's what we need to keep Trustus alive and growing."



Trustus Theatre's Jessica Fichter

by Libby Campbell

By now we all know the story of Trustus Theatre, the brainchild/heartchild of Jim and Kay Thigpen whose dream it was to bring new, cutting-edge theatre to Columbia. That tiny theatre at the top of a narrow flight of stairs in an old storefront on Assembly grew and grew until it became the nationally recognized organization it is today. The move to Columbia's historic Vista was just one more pioneering step taken by the Thigpens. That step, and the success of the theatre showed other artistic, entrepreneurial souls the way. Today the Congaree Vista is a shining, vibrant business district, rejuvenated from the dying and decaying eyesore it was 30 years ago. Jim Thigpen stepped down (sort of) in 2012 and Dewey Scott-Wiley was hired as Artistic Director. Chad Henderson followed her. Both Scott-Wiley and Henderson continued to build on the legacy the Thigpens created.

Then came 'Rona.

We all saw what the inability to adapt can do to businesses, arts organizations included. Theatre is particularly vulnerable. Theatre practices a symbiotic relationship between actors and audiences, along with the countless individuals who make a production happen. The stage and the seats at Trustus were empty for what seemed to be an eternity. Slowly, cultural activities began to return to something resembling normal. Houses gradually moved from half-capacity to occasionally full capacity. After 15 years as Artistic Director and then as Executive Director, Chad Henderson stepped down. And that's when Jessica Fichter stepped in.

Fichter grew up in Columbia and graduated from Spring Valley High School. She left Columbia in 2016. A director, playwright, and teaching artist, Fichter received a B.A. in theatre education, an M.Ed. in divergent learning, and an MFA in directing from the Actors Studio Drama School





at Pace University in New York City. She has worked in South Carolina, North Carolina, New Jersey, and New York City in a variety of theatrical jobs, all of which have combined to make her imminently qualified for the Executive Director position.

When lockdown started, Fichter was living in Jersey City, NJ with her husband and children. Facing a dearth of work yet still having mouths which insisted on being fed, she and her husband returned to Columbia where they have family.

Her first priority was to get bigger audiences back into the theatre but, after two years of “Netflix and chill,” people were out of the habit of getting dressed and going out. Henderson did a masterful job of keeping the work of Trustus going during that time and Fichter continued to build on that momentum when she took over the post. Through her efforts in increasing the social media presence, clearing out and updating the email database (Trustus has an “open” rate of 20 - 40%. A good result when you consider how much e-mail we all receive.) She discussed a return to more “traditional” forms of advertising such as print media, billboards, and local television programming.

In their most recent production, *The Mad Ones*, Fichter was delighted with the collaboration with the University of South Carolina. She is hopeful that this collaboration will continue, as both Trustus and the University have mutually beneficial goals and directives

In terms of the upcoming 2023 - 2024 theatre season, this writer is not at liberty to divulge titles at this point, but it promises to be an exciting season, with more diversity

than I’ve seen in quite some time. Fichter noted that the demographics of the Trustus audience have shifted. Her intent is to continue to grow the audience to include not only younger audience members, but to also appeal to the traditional theatre goer.

When asked about her proudest accomplishment in her first year, Fichter states unequivocally that it is her collaboration with Terrance Henderson, who is directing the upcoming production *Fairview*. (*Fairview* was originally scheduled for the 2020 season and was about to go into rehearsals when the COVID lockdown was put in place.) Henderson and Trustus were awarded an NEA grant to implement DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) work at *Fairview*. The production will feature talk-backs on DEI, and the cast will receive special coaching. Implementing DEI training will ensure that Trustus continues to be a safe, welcoming space to everyone who enters its doors, just as Jim and Kay Thigpen intended.

But theatres always need money and Trustus is no exception. The physical structure has been improved many times, including a new ventilation system put in place to accommodate COVID safety concerns. Capital campaigns are expensive, and knowing where to start is daunting. In her first weeks at Trustus, Fichter was clearing out an office storage space. There was a long cardboard tube which had apparently been tossed back for safekeeping. She opened it and unfurled a set of architectural renderings the Thigpens had commissioned back in 1999, showing exactly what they wanted and how they wanted it done. Those plans are now safe in Fichter’s office, a serendipitous gift from the founders themselves, guiding her in the decision of what the theatre company’s next steps should be.

She Said

Becci Robbins (Re)Writes SC History for Everyone

By Ed Madden

You don't have to talk to Becci Robbins for very long before you realize there are three key ideas that drive her writing.

The first is urgency. She says it is important to record stories now while the people who lived them are still alive. When her friend Merll Truesdale died in 2019, he left behind a huge collection of political materials and music. As his friends sorted through "all this magnificent stuff," she thought, "We've gotta get these stories down."

"Doing this work," she says, "has made me understand the importance of capturing people's stories while you can. I didn't do that in my own family. I didn't ask my father or mother the questions I wish I could have asked them now.... I didn't think to ask and now I can't."

There is an urgency for her to the issues as well as the people. As she writes at the end of her book on civil rights activist Modjeska Monteith Simkins, the first of five she has published on South Carolina history: "The political and social dynamics of exclusion, extremism, and racism remain stubbornly intact in our home state. I share her frustration and sense of urgency."

The second key idea for Robbins is history—or a richer and more accurate sense of history, especially when it comes to shared narratives about who we are and how we got here. Things we should know about our history are kept from us, she says, intentionally or unintentionally. If we only knew those stories it might change the way we understand our past and our future.

In a series of five small booklets published over the past decade, Robbins has diligently explored and amplified historical moments and voices too easily forgotten, too long elided, too often distorted or ignored or erased. The first three tell the stories of three women who were outspoken advocates for social justice for African Americans, for lesbians and gay men, for women: Modjeska Monteith Simkins, Harriet Hancock, and Sarah

Leverette. This trio of activist profiles was followed by two booklets that document stories of resistance. The first focused on the civil rights and labor movements, the second on radical youth movements in Columbia of the 1960s and 1970s.

Together, these booklets offer a complex history of South Carolina through, as Robbins puts it, "things you didn't learn in school." As an example, she points to an unprecedented interracial youth congress held at Township Auditorium in 1946. The meeting of the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) lasted three days, drew over 3000 attendees (about 800 delegates from Southern black colleges), and featured such internationally known speakers as W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson. Retelling the story of the rise and fall of SNYC "and the collective amnesia that followed" in *History Denied*, Robbins writes, "This is a cautionary tale," one that "offers a timely warning about how history is made and unmade, and how that shapes our shared narrative."

These deceptively small booklets are packed—with letters, speeches, bits of oral history, archival material, newspaper articles, photographs, lists of sources and resources. Robbins carefully credits the historians and scholars whose work she draws on. Talking about the work, she also situates it in the relation to Historic Columbia initiatives on minority histories, the Columbia SC 63 project, and Dr. Bobby Donaldson's work with the Center for Civil Rights History and Research at the University of South Carolina—"a convergence of people," she says, "who really do care about correcting the historical record and providing space for sometimes uncomfortable conversations."

Despite that historical and scholarly weight, however, these books are remarkably accessible. That is the third idea that drives her work: accessibility. From the beginning, Robbins insists, it was important that these booklets be accessible, visually appealing, and free, that anyone who wanted a copy could get a copy. (Print editions were distributed for free, and all but one is available at the SC Progressive Network website.)

When the South Carolina Progressive Network moved to the Modjeska Monteith Simkins House in 2009, they quickly sensed a need for a publication about Simkins' life and work. "We needed a brochure," Robbins says, something "to elevate her history" and to illustrate her connections to the Network and its director, Brett Bursey, with whom she had worked. Located at 2024 Marion Street, the historic home was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1994 because of its connection to the civil rights movement. It served as a home to the Network from 2009 to 2017, when the Network moved to a nearby address.

"That became my task," says Robbins, who serves as the communications director for the Network, "to fit her enormous life into a brochure." It was, she says, "an impossible task."

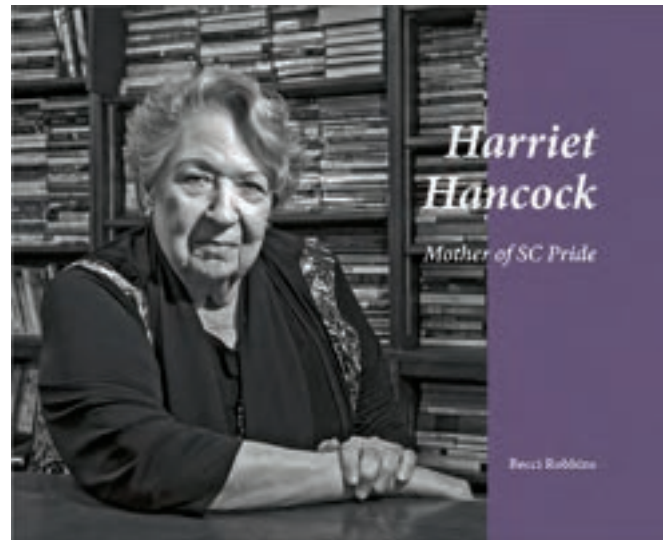
Although Robbins didn't set out to write "a trilogy," she soon turned to a companion book about Harriet Hancock and then Sarah Leverette.

The mother of a gay man, Hancock founded the first LGBTQ civil rights organization in the state, a chapter of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) that was the first in the Southeast. During the AIDS crisis, she helped found Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services (PALSS), and she later helped to organize the first state Pride March, held in Columbia in 1990.

Leverette was one of the first women admitted to the South Carolina Bar, graduated the only female in the USC law school class of 1942, and returned to her alma mater to work in the law library and to teach, the first woman to gain faculty status there. She is, Robbins writes, "a big deal."

Shifting from writing about Simkins to writing about Hancock and Leverette, who were both still alive, was daunting. Because of her respect for the work Hancock had done, Robbins says, "I felt such responsibility to get it right." Although she knew Hancock, she says she only "knew of" Leverette and found the prospect of interviewing her intimidating, at first. "I was really nervous," she says. "I knew her reputation. I felt like she had this built-in bullshit detector." Like Hancock, though, she was "so welcoming and so warm."

Robbins first got to know Hancock through "dangerous and heartbreaking work" with PALSS, and indeed Robbins now credits Hancock for her career as a progressive journalist. She met Hancock when she



interviewed her about her pro bono work with people with AIDS for a journal published by the South Carolina Bar Association, and when they refused to run it, she went to the progressive journal *Point*, published by the Grassroots Organizing Workshop or GROW, broadening the piece into a larger indictment of the politics of AIDS in South Carolina and “the horrible way that human beings were treated.” She soon joined the work of PALSS as a “buddy” or companion for someone with AIDS. She also became the editor of *Point*.

Robbins says Hancock was “so generous with her time,” the two of them “spending hours at her kitchen table.” She smiles, “She would make me lunch because she’s a mom and that’s what she does.” Leverette, on the other hand, had a dining table never used for dining. “It was covered with files, things she was working on.” What especially impressed her about Leverette was “how deep and strong her relationships were with everybody in her life,” including law school faculty and staff, women lawyers, and the League of Women Voters, with which she was deeply involved.

Leverette was 96 years old when Robbins interviewed her. “After a certain age,” Robbins says of women in American culture, “we become invisible.” Calling that “another kind of erasure,” Robbins highlights the fact that all three women were active well into their 80s

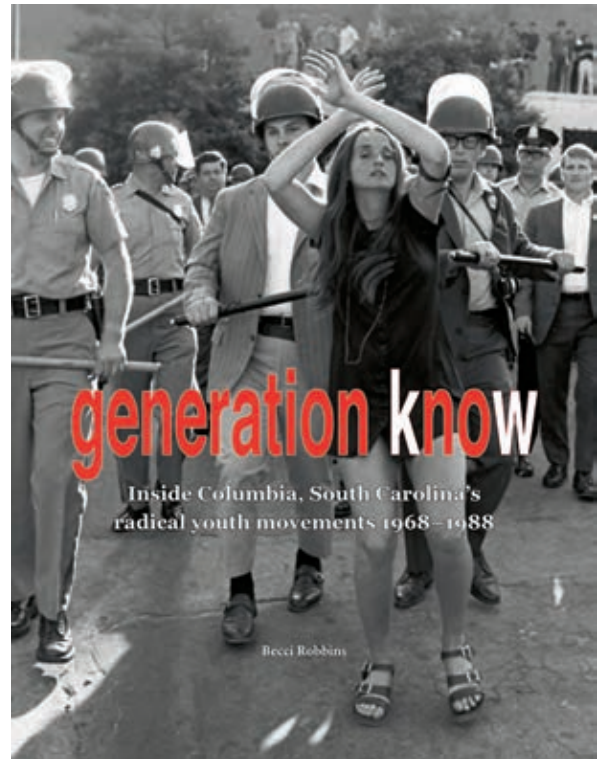
The three books tell the women’s sometimes difficult personal stories, but the focus is on their activism. They also put those stories in a broader context, situating their lives and activism in the context of historical events, state politics, and national movements. All three include quotations from the women in highlighted columns titled appropriately, “She Said.”

At the end of the Leverette booklet, Robbins says that she hopes that girls and young women pick up these booklets and find themselves moved and impressed by the women’s stories. These three women, she writes, “show the power a single citizen can have, given enough passion and commitment.”

She adds, all of them deserve full biographies.

~

Robbins had planned a fourth book in the same format as the first three, this one to focus on South Carolina State Senator Joseph Neal of Hopkins, who passed away in 2017. “His death really crushed me,” says Robbins. “He



was not just a dear friend,” she says, “he was such a force, just this giant light of goodness and decency. We were devastated when we lost him.”

Neal had been a cofounder of the Network and helped to lead it for over a decade, later becoming their “go-to guy” in the legislature for information and support. “I wanted to remember him,” Robbins says, but the pandemic and other issues intervened. So, she moved to extend the story about the 1947 SNYC convention, expanding the book to “other things you probably didn’t learn in school” about racism, the civil rights movement, and labor history. She also shifted the format to magazine style and size, strengthening the visually friendly and accessible appearance.

When *History Denied* was released in 2018, Robbins wrote, “I learned so much on this project—not the least of which is how little I know. The more I dug and read, the angrier I got about my miseducation.”

If the death of Neal led to the publication of *History Denied*, it was Merll Truesdale’s death, and Robbins’ awareness that his rich experience had never been recorded, that more directly compelled the publication of *Generation Know*, the fifth book in the series. Robbins says that she had been wanting to write about GROW since she began work there, but Truesdale’s death impelled her to start interviewing members of that community.

Maybe community is a fourth and fundamental idea driving her work.

As she worked through Truesdale's archives and interviewed others who had been part of GROW, she began to explore "what led to GROW becoming GROW," expanding the project's focus to take in the Vietnam War and campus unrest at the University of South Carolina. She wrote about antiwar organizing at Fort Jackson and student protests at USC. She wrote about the UFO coffeehouse on Main Street across from City Hall, the antiwar answer to the USO down the street. "Not your mother's USO," Robbins laughs.

All of these books are published under the umbrella of the Modjeska Simkins School of Human Rights, which began offering a series of classes in 2015 to people interested in learning more about Black and indigenous history in the state, civil rights and labor movements, the women's and LGBTQ movements.

"People are hungry for that kind of thing," she says."

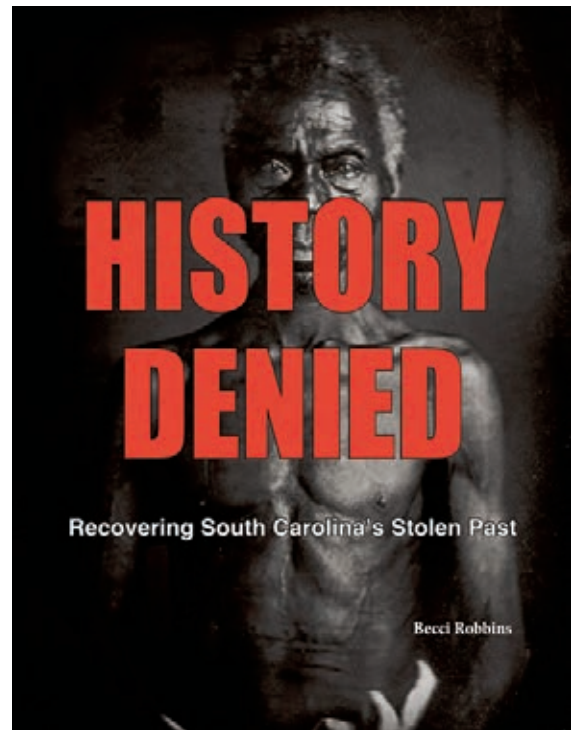
~

As we finish this article, the Associated Press reports that book ban attempts hit a record high in 2022, the highest since the American Library Association began keeping record 20 years ago. While former challenges came from parents about individual books, they are now coordinated by national groups like the ironically-named Moms for Liberty, active in South Carolina, who are demanding sweeping removals and restrictions on books and content matter.

GOP legislators across the nation are trying to keep information about our nation's racial and racist past out of classrooms, and they are removing books about LGBTQ people from public and school libraries. Twitter was recently full of images of Florida teachers taping butcher paper over their classroom bookshelves because they don't know if their classroom libraries will pass muster with the state- and self-appointed censors.

Questions about what you can know, when you can know it, and what information you are allowed access to have never felt more fraught.

Urgency, history, accessibility, community. In times like these, this work matters. These books matter.



Booklets on SC history by Becci Robbins:

Modjeska Monteith Simkins: A South Carolina Revolutionary (2014)

Harriet Hancock: Mother of SC Pride (2016)

Sarah Leverette: South Carolina lawyer, teacher, mentor, ground breaker (2016)

History Denied: Recovering South Carolina's Stolen Past (2018)

Generation Know: Inside Columbia, South Carolina's radical youth movements 1968-1988 (2022)

Alyssa Stewart

A Woman of Music & Words

Words & Image by Jared Johnson

Alyssa Stewart is the kind of person who is hard to label or put in a particular kind of box. She's the perfect combination of enigma and artist. At one moment she's wandering the shelves at the city's newest locally owned bookstore (All Good Books) with the wonder and enthusiasm of a child. Minutes later, she's sharing her favorite songs and bands with a total stranger. But when she opens her mouth, her words drip with the wisdom of a woman approaching thirty years of age. And the same can be said of her music and poetry. Stewart's recent performance at the Jasper Project's first ever Artists Showing Artist showcased a woman with her feet planted in two worlds. And these worlds fuel her artistry.

Stewart credits her family for her love of music and voice. Her mother, a singer, grew up in a deft household and Stewart's sister taught her the skill of harmonizing. The family made a point of incorporating music into their play and daily life. And both her sister and brothers are also artists in their own right. It's hard to separate Stewart from her family and the role music plays in her family life. It's even harder to separate Stewart from the role religion plays in her family and the impact it has on her lyrics and poetry.

Growing up with religion isn't a foreign concept for a lot of Black artists. Religion often has a way of shaping the work. This is true for Stewart. Her song lyrics express the beautifully complicated nature of living within two places at once. Spiritual and secular. Stewart's song lyrics are a window into both worlds and her position of processing that dichotomy. The music isn't gospel but more of a blend of biblical references that meets a soulful acoustic sound that goes beyond folksy. She recently moved out

of her family's home to explore living with individuals who she's not related to. According to Stewart, this recent move is a big deal. It's a big deal for her as an adult and for her art.

There's so much to learn about Stewart. She's found a way of navigating her identities through her art. If people are lucky enough to experience her music or work, they'll find a way to navigate the beautiful complications of their own lives. When asked about her music and the process of rehearsing and performing she says, "It feels good in my body...I've got the feel of the guitar. I've got the feel of what I want for my voice...I feel like whatever is going to happen, with the level of preparation that I've done, it's going to be what I'm supposed to do."

only toni morrison is allowed to hurt my feelings

Sula sweet Nel bite
glory to the morning sun.
O blessed mulberry-stained fingers,
O beloved, purple-nourished mouth -
uncrossed eyes wide and taking in
everything

You'll wish you could remember
everything

You'll wish you could
forget.

But you -
I will not consign you
to rug-burned, ringwormed
distant days.

Come.
I have pomegranates for your monkey bar - bared tummy
and
I've grown hair to card with your NO BITE - soaked nails.

Let's climb trees
and be our cruel, charming selves.
Let's eat so many dill pickles.
You can drink the brine.
Grow strange and sharp and soft and
slow.

Are you happy with me
being happy sometimes?





Approaching its 10th volume, Fall Lines – a literary convergence is a journal of poetry and prose presented by The Jasper Project in partnership with Richland Library and One Columbia for Arts and Culture. The Combahee River Prize will join the Saluda River Prize for Poetry and the Broad River Prize for Prose. All contributors will be asked to indicate if they are members of the BIPOC community when they complete their Cover Letter Template to submit their Fall Lines contributions. BIPOC writers will be eligible for the Combahee River Prize as well as the Saluda and Broad River prizes. Like the existing prizes, the Combahee River Prize is a cash prize of \$250 and a framed commemorative certificate.

The title for the Combahee River Prize was selected to honor the freed woman and Underground Railway engineer, Harriet Tubman, whose raid at the Combahee Ferry on June 2, 1863 during the American Civil War resulted in the rescue of 750 enslaved individuals

Fall Lines will accept submissions of previously unpublished poetry, essays, short fiction, and flash fiction from April 15, 2023 through July 31, 2023.

While the editors of Fall Lines hope to attract the work of writers and poets from the Carolinas and the Southeastern US, acceptance of work is not dependent upon residence. Publication in Fall Lines will be determined by a panel of judges and accepted authors will be notified by December 31, 2023, with a publication date in early 2024. This year we are offering three cash prizes of \$250 each. The Saluda River Prize for Poetry and the Broad River Prize for Prose sponsored by the Richland Library Friends and Foundation as well as the Combahee River Prize which will be awarded to a SC writer of color in either poetry or prose.

The Columbia Fall Line is a natural junction, along which the Congaree River falls and rapids form, running parallel to the east coast of the country between the resilient rocks of the Appalachians and the softer, more gentle coastal plain.

2023 Entries

After filling out the submission form you will receive an email with instructions for submitting your work.

Poetry

- Up to 5 poems may be submitted in a SINGLE WORD FILE.
- No single poem should exceed four 6 x 9-inch pages

New This Year- To ensure the integrity of the poet's spacing, it is best that poems be formatted to appear on a 6 x 9-inch page with 1-inch margins. If submitted in a larger format, we cannot guarantee your poem will be printed with the spacing you desire.

Prose

- Up to 5 prose entries may be submitted in a SINGLE WORD FILE.
- Entries should be 2500 words or less

ALL ENTRIES SHOULD BE TITLED.

There is no fee to enter, but submissions that fail to follow the above instructions will be disqualified without review. Simultaneous submissions will not be considered. Failure to disclose simultaneous submissions will result in a lack of eligibility in any future Jasper Project publications.



Art at the Koger Center

By Emily Moffitt
Photos by Jada Mack

In late September of 2022, crew members from the Pittsburgh based Squonk were getting ready to set up for an outdoor performances of a show at the Koger Center. During some downtime, Koger Center's Assistant Director Karen Magradey found them admiring the painting *Flowers and Water* by Columbia's own Philip Mullen. One of the crewmates said, "A lot of the performing arts facilities and theatres we go to often have tacky posters or nothing super impressive on display. It is amazing to be in [the Koger Center] and see real, professional, and beautiful works of art. This piece also happens to remind me of my favorite album cover."

From the Greene Street entrance of the Koger Center, a poignant statue of a woman holding a quilt beckons you inside. Upon walking into the lobby, you are greeted by swathes of Mullen's paintings. Modern sculptures adorn the spaces adjacent to staircases. It almost feels like a miniature scavenger hunt, finding all the artwork the building has to offer.

The Koger Center for the Arts continues to solidify itself as the premier performing arts facility of the Midlands and contributes to the cultural landscape of South Carolina through wondrous Broadway productions, enthralling ballet performances and exceptional symphony concerts. But there's more. The facility hosts a plethora of rotating exhibitions of local, well-known artists within the Upstairs Gallery and the newly created Hallway Gallery, born out of a collaboration between Koger and Jasper. Even during the downtime between exhibitions occupied by studio visits and curation, there is still something to look at on every level of the building. There is a good amount of history behind each piece as well, and the variety of artistic disciplines represented throughout the facility bolsters the staff's mission to represent more visual arts in Columbia.

Under older leadership at the Koger Center, there was an air of uncertainty as to whether there would be any art shown around the building, let alone a permanent



collection. The consensus was that there were too many variables related to competition amongst artists and difficulty with upkeep and rotation of art for it to be worthwhile keeping in the facility. This was during the 1990s, when the facility had a different staff. For laying the foundation of the visual art standards and staples of the Koger Center, enter Philip Mullen. (Please read our centerfold article on Mullen on page 26.)

The vast collection of Mullen's work on the walls of Gonzales Hall has been there since 1990. Initially, they were only up for about 8 months. It was all part of a temporary exhibition to dip the toes of the facility into the visual arts but was taken down after the months passed. This resulted in a public outcry and demand for not only Mullen's art to stay up, but for more public art. Now, the official collection of Mullen's work is referred to as "The

James C. Moore, Jr. Collection of the Work of Philip Mullen” and eventually became part of the University’s official collection of art. The pieces have remained in their same spots, bringing in interested audiences every day.

The Koger Center features twenty pieces by Mullen including *Women in the Country* and *Barnwell Impressions*. To make the work displayed here even more accessible and interactive, a virtual tour of the work in the building was implemented in 2019. Featuring narration for each piece by Mullen himself, the tour gives visitors the opportunity to engage even more with the Columbia artist. Mullen has been a huge advocate for the growth of the Koger Center, and the staff wanted to give something back to him as a form of gratitude. “What we offer to Columbia is in the name: ‘The Koger Center for the Arts,’ not just ‘The Koger Center for the Performing Arts,’” Koger Center Director Nate Terracio says. “We all want to feature everything about what makes the arts so great in Columbia, and Mullen exemplifies those qualities we look for.”

On the walls by the orchestra level’s right-side hangs *Autumn Melody*, a tapestry created by Mexican artist Leonardo Nierman. The tapestry was a gift to the University’s School of Music in 2004, with Nierman himself present for the dedication. The work was presented in honor of Dot Ryall, acknowledging her



dedication to the arts in Columbia. Towering upon the wall at 6.5 ft by 9.65 ft, the work matches the tone that one would expect at a performance by the South Carolina philharmonic or USC’s Symphony Orchestra. Creating magnificent tapestries was only a small facet of Nierman’s portfolio as he is known for sculpting and painting, as well. Referred to as the “Jackson Pollock of Latin American art” by art critics, his love for music and art alike coalesces in his art. The abstraction of the string instruments and the cool tones balanced throughout work well next to the vibrant and illuminated works by Mullen just a few feet away. “Its inclusion in the permanent art collection at Koger emphasizes the effect that even non-South Carolina native artists can have on the fine arts here,” says Magradey.

After a successful exhibition of Laura Spong’s artwork, the featured piece from “*Laura Spong: A Passionate Perspective*” found a home in the Koger Center Hall of Fame. *Big Red*, one of the hallmark pieces from her career, resides among the memorial photos of some of Columbia’s finest contributors to the arts scene. The piece measures at a whopping 96 inches by 192 inches,

staring right at those who come down the steps of the orchestra level. The work demands a large space to really emphasize the meticulous yet organic brushwork. The success of her exhibition led to Koger becoming its permanent home until a lucky guest comes by and decides to purchase it for their own collection.

Several of the pieces in the Koger collection were donations from the now defunct Cultural Council of Richland and Lexington Counties. The pieces were donated either through a collaboration with another philanthropic endeavor or the effort to provide more public art, and several of them occupy their own space on each floor of the facility. One of these pieces of public art includes a work by James T. Hubbell, a sculpture titled *Above Each Door*. A donation born out of a collaboration between the Cultural Council and the Columbia Housing Authority, this piece is a striking glass sculpture akin to much of Hubbell's portfolio. Hubbell's love for nature and creating art that is a true part of larger houses he designed truly shines, with an image of a door making up the framing of the piece. The door is split in the middle with a floral design and two arms holding the middle of the stem together, creating an opening at the bottom of the door. What does the door lead to? Whose hands are those? Hubbell's portfolio contains plenty of these ambiguous doors with no definitive entrance or destination, but the glass pieces compliment the glass walls of the Koger Center, allowing for the perfect amount of natural light to bathe *Above Each Door* in radiant sunlight, highlighting each individual intricacy within the glass panes. In addition to this piece, a steel sculpture by Eugenia Perez del Toro and a sculpture by Lawrence Anthony were

both donated to the Koger Center through the Cultural Council. As the Koger Center is a pinnacle of public art, the Cultural Council's contributions helped to bolster the reputation of the facility's collection of visual art.

So, to those who mark visiting the Koger Center as one of their core memories of living in Columbia, make sure to keep the visual art in mind next time you take a trip down for a Philharmonic concert or a show!





Drink Small's Legacy as a Blues Legend

Via a Conversation with SC Blues Expert, Clair DeLune

By Kevin Oliver

When legendary South Carolina blues artist Drink Small “The Blues Doctor,” recently turned 90 years old, there was a flurry of recognition marking that milestone, including a rare live appearance at a Koger Center birthday celebration jam that featured a host of others paying musical tribute. Small does very few appearances or interviews these days due to health reasons, but Jasper was able to connect with a longtime associate, Claire DeLune, for some insight and stories. The author of the compendium *South Carolina Blues*, among other works, DeLune also hosted the weekly blues radio program “Blues Moon Radio” on WUSC-FM for 29 years. Regarding Drink Small at 90, DeLune says that he’s focused on more than just how he’s remembered as a musician.

“His main focus is getting right with God before he meets his maker,” DeLune says. “And he’s very cognizant of that time being near.”

DeLune was Small’s publicist for many years, and his very human worries and fears factor into many of the stories she can tell of those times.

“Drink had a huge gig one time here in Columbia, and he called me that morning and started off the same way he would often begin— ‘I’m going to die today,’ he’d say. I’d reply ‘no, you’re not,’ and he’d say ‘yes, I am,’ and we’d go on like this for fifteen minutes,” DeLune recalls. “One day I finally got him to agree that we’d done this same routine for over a year, and could we just think positive and presume we’re going to live?”



Small's career is too long to expand upon in this space in detail (See his entry in *South Carolina Blues* or the biography *Drink Small: the Life and Times of South Carolina's Blues Doctor* by Gail Wilson-Giarratano), but he followed a similar path to many blues artists—starting out in church singing and playing gospel music, but diving headlong into the bars and juke joint circuit of the southeast, playing college towns and dive bars alike for decades. It was there that this writer encountered Small in the mid-1980s, playing some raunchy but riveting blues songs with titles including “Baby Leave Your Panties Home.” DeLune says he has distanced himself from much of that early material these days, even as fans still remember it fondly.

“People remember him for the fraternity party stuff, and he had one song that he really doesn't like now,” She says. “That seems to be one that comes up a lot. It was a span of his career, and we all have things we wouldn't do again with our current outlook, don't we?”

Drink's reputation is mostly regional, but among other musicians he is very well regarded, DeLune says, relating a story of one such encounter he tells about Sister Rosetta Tharpe. “She was the hottest thing at the time, an original rock and roller playing gospel like Drink,” DeLune says. “He went on tour with her in the southeast for a string of shows, and

the quote he tells about her response to his playing was ‘You come on the road with me and we'll do a duo act; we'll be the Mickey and Sylvia of gospel.’”

The problem was that Drink has never liked to travel; he will not get on a plane, or a boat. So Europe, a profitable destination for American blues artists throughout the 1950s and 60s, was out, as was any thought of extensive overseas or even national touring. “He just doesn't like not having control over things he does,” DeLune observes. “He always wanted to know everything that was going to happen at bookings, at his gigs.”

As he enters his ninth decade, Drink Small may have slowed down but the recognition of his artistic contributions to South Carolina, and the world, has not. ColaJazz and ETV collaborated on the 90th birthday celebration concert that was rebroadcast on South Carolina Public Radio, and there was a film done in partnership with ETV that has yet to be released. The State Museum has an ongoing display on exhibit that is a special tribute to him as well.

“Shelley Magee and Cola Jazz are working to provide more great opportunities for him, and for his music to continue to reach people,” DeLune says. “I'm glad he's finally getting the respect he deserves.”



Archive photos from The State Newspaper Photograph Archive, courtesy of Richland Library.

Opposite: 'Drink Small at Home (1993)

Above: Drink Small receives Folk Heritage Award (1990).

Palmetto Luna & Ivan Segura

By Shannon Ivey

Photos courtesy of the subject

Many people in South Carolina have encountered Palmetto Luna's work over the years but might not have recognized it as such. From Day of the Dead celebrations, to poetry contests, and an extensive exhibition history, Palmetto Luna's mission is clear: to foster an understanding of Hispanic/Latino culture by promoting artistic creation and providing opportunities for cultural expression for the community in South Carolina.

In 2007, a fortunate meeting at an event called InspirArte set this story in motion. InspirArte (Art inspired by Latin American artists) was Alejandro Garcia's project at the South Carolina Arts Museum in Columbia, SC. The project brought together South Carolina Latino artists, and was so popular that it was repeated. The success of this event did two things. One, it informed the model of how Palmetto Luna runs today: much like the Jasper Project, an intentionally all volunteer organization but with a collective of Latinx artists who share and create opportunities. Second, it introduced two influential Latino artists and collective members of Palmetto Luna: Alejandro Garcia and Ivan Segura.



In his day job, Ivan Segura is the Director of Multicultural Affairs at the SC Minority Affairs Commission. Segura was born and raised in Mexico, which is where he went to college. Segura immigrated to South Carolina at 27 because his wife, Amanda, is from Kentucky. "I didn't learn English until I was 23. In fact, that is how I met my wife," he says. Ivan and Amanda had planned to move to Kentucky to be near her family, but they realized something: both the problems for immigrants like Ivan and the opportunities to help solve them were in South Carolina. So, they stayed and built a life.

Palmetto Luna became a nonprofit organization in 2008, and later, Segura would become the executive director. Segura views his volunteer job at Palmetto Luna as a passion and a mission. "My job is to get money to pay our artists, and to coordinate the opportunities to educate the public so that we have representation across the state," he says. He understands the needs of their artists, as many, like him, have a full-time job and familial responsibilities. "I have a beautiful family with three kids and a full-time job. This is my passion."

With his background in finance, Ivan Segura is a powerful advocate of the need for and lack of support of Latinx art and culture in the state. "I can speak to agencies and organizations about how they haven't included percentages of Latin artists, and they respond to that with their support. With my skills, I can point out where you can contact and work together. This is the Palmetto Luna mission: bringing people together."

According to Segura, there are around 58 Latino artists in South Carolina. 99% of those artists have employment that is not creating art, like himself. He knows that when he asks artists to go to do presentations, they are turning down other paying opportunities, so it is important to pay them for their time, materials, and labor. Even though some artists try to turn down the stipend, a modest amount of around \$150, he insists.

As an all-volunteer organization, the majority of their funding goes to the artists. "98% of our funding goes directly to arts programming and paying artists with stipends," Segura says. The mission to provide financial and foundational support for the artists in the community is life changing for them, especially for immigrants, Segura says. Immigrants who are, maybe for the first time, getting paid for their words and talent.



For Palmetto Luna, collaboration is key. “The model we use is understanding that we are very small. There is not a lot of support for Latino art in South Carolina. We don’t have a Latino art center. We can’t do everything ourselves. We have to collaborate. I advocate for us, and we collaborate with the larger art organizations in the state.”

Over the last 10 years, Day of the Dead Celebrations have been the most recognizable Palmetto Luna events. Supported in part by the City of Columbia and the South Carolina Arts Commission funding, these events center an important part of the mission of Palmetto Luna: education.

Another successful collaboration is a poetry contest that they have run seven times. “When we put the first call out for poems, we received 162. Funding wise, though, there was a discrepancy between our funding and other organizations having poetry contests. For instance, USC received \$25,000 in funding for theirs and received 300 submissions. We were funded \$500 and had 162 submissions.”

According to Segura, this demonstrates why his job is important, in making sure there are conversations about the funding biases. The response to the call for poetry also proved the need for expression in the

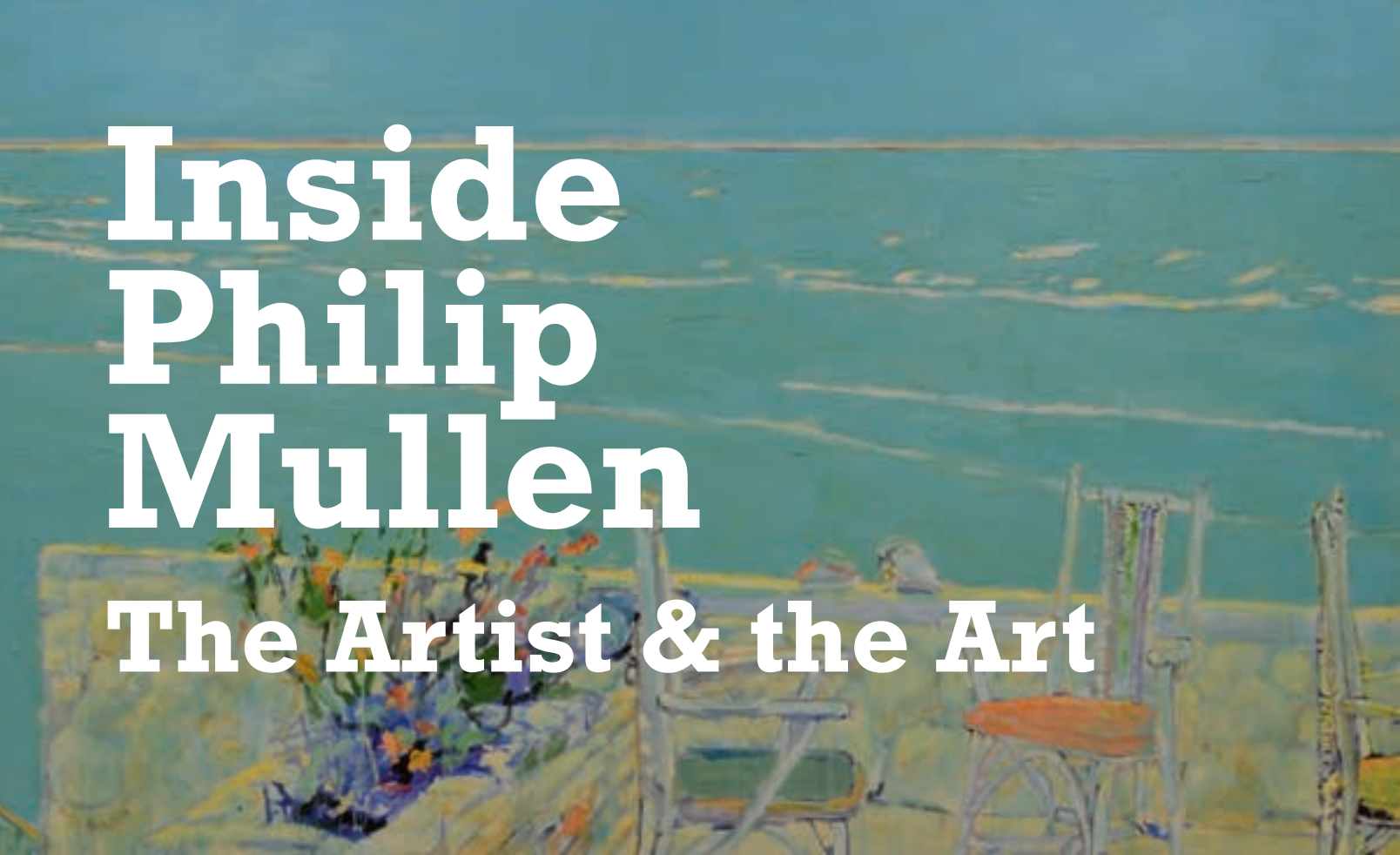
Latinx community, as well as highlighting change. “In 2007, 10% of our submissions were in English. The last time, in 2015, 85% of the submissions were in English. This is a huge transformation...change in our community. 92.7% of Latinos are American citizens. These kids were born in the states. Most of them don’t speak Spanish.”

An ongoing event that Segura, father of three, loves is Colores: a Latino children’s drawing contest. Palmetto Luna finds its budding artists by reaching out to art teachers in elementary schools, ESL teachers, and Spanish teachers across the state who have Latinx students in their classes for submissions.

Segura highlights a lesser recognized, but extremely important part of the work of Palmetto Luna: the Latino Arts in Motion program. This program pairs artists with events, schools, and opportunities. Segura told Jasper about an event where they paired a group of mothers with an event. “We have professional dancers, yes, and also we have local groups that are saving our traditions. These Mamas are the culture bearers. It’s beautiful to see the mamas and kids all dressed up. They are learning the tradition, like I did.”

What’s coming up in 2023 for Palmetto Luna? Segura said that PL will focus on work in non-traditional places. They are aiming for more representation in Aiken, Pee Dee, Beaufort. They are also focusing on non-traditional forms of art: musicians, artists, dancers, artists-cultural expressions. He invites readers to discuss collaborations by reaching out to Palmettoluna@gmail.com or Ivanseguramx@gmail.com.





Inside Philip Mullen

The Artist & the Art

By Cindi Boiter
Art photos courtesy of the artist &
Centerfold by Sean Rayford

In the contemplation of a painting by renown visual artist Philip Mullen, one must commit to more than looking at the art. To fully appreciate the piece the viewer must look deep within the art. There is so much more on the canvass than initially meets the viewing eye.

The same is true when contemplating the artist himself. Mullen is one of the finest examples of a successful living South Carolina-based artist at this moment in time. The description of the gentleman as a South Carolina-based artist, not a local artist, is of great importance to Mullen as he reminds this writer of something he taught her many years ago. Just because a city claims an artist as their own does not mean the artist belongs solely to that city. Mullen is not a local artist, rather he is an artist who lives in Columbia but has found a larger international audience. According to Mullen, this more accurately reflects that, through his gallery representation in New York, Los Angeles,

and elsewhere, his art has found a larger audience. “In the mid-1990s my biggest collector for a while was in Brazil,” he says.

Three Decisive Career Incidents

But of course, Mullen did not arrive on the international scene as a fully formed and accomplished artist. In looking back, the still quite young-at-art 80-year-old identifies three specific occurrences that directed his path to success. The first occurrence involved the decisions he would make surrounding his initial study of art.

“As a poor school student, I did not want to go to college but didn’t know what else to do,” he says. “I went to hang out with a friend who was an art major. At the time, I was not an art major and therefore was not required to take the beginner classes” in which others were expected to enroll. “So, I talked my way into starting my studies in an upper level painting class,” he continues. “The professor who signed me up made a point of putting me in ‘the other guy’s section.’ Fortunately for me, the other guy was a very successful New York artist who was visiting the University of Minnesota for the year. He lit my fire for painting.”

At the University of Minnesota where he received a B.A. in 1964, Mullen studied under visiting professor and Abstract Expressionist Edward Corbett (1919 - 1971) as well as Indian space painter and surrealist Peter Busa (1914 – 1985). Corbett’s art had been included in the 1952 Museum of Modern Art’s “Fifteen Americans” exhibit along with that of Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and more. Corbett was also old friends with abstract painter Adolph Reinhardt (1913 – 1957) who was represented by the Grace Borgenicht Gallery in New York. Busa’s art had been included in the prestigious 9th Street Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture in 1951. According to Mullen, artists like Corbett “showed me what art at the highest level could be.”

Mullen’s work was primarily figurative in his earliest days. In 1966 he earned an M.A. in studio art from the University of North Dakota and, in 1970, a Ph.D. in Comparative Arts from Ohio University.

Gradually, the artist opened to the inspiration of European Modernism and his move to South



*Above: Mullen in his study by Sean Rayford.
Below: 'Jane's View'*



Carolina in 1969, where he began teaching Studio Art continuing until 2000, signaled the real beginning of his fascination with abstract expressionism and color field painting.

“I went to nine schools before I graduated high school so I hardly know where I grew up,” Mullen says naming Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Minnesota as a few of the places he briefly lived. “The only place the weather made any sense to me was in Texas so, in 1969, when I was searching for a university teaching position I focused on the South. The University of South Carolina, which had only seven art faculty members at the time, was in the market for three new positions, one each in art history, art education, and studio art. At the time, it was to their advantage to have as many Ph.D. professors as possible to promote establishing graduate degrees. Art history and art education would provide two, however, my unusual credential of being a practicing artist with a PhD could provide three,” he explains, citing this “great match” as the second of the three incidents that vastly impacted the course of his life.

“John Benz, the chair of the USC art department taught me how to operate in the university, got me tenure in four years, and promoted me to full professor in eight years,” Mullen says. “He helped set up a situation that allowed me to both teach and to develop a serious commercial gallery career.”

Mullen identifies the third path-finding occurrence as the time when a curator from the Whitney Museum in New York saw his work in a solo exhibit at the Heath Gallery in Atlanta and chose Mullen’s painting, “Two Rains,” for inclusion in the 1975 Whitney Biennial of Contemporary Art—the most prestigious contemporary art group show in the country. “As an article in the New York Times indicated years later, Mullen says, “I was the only artist ever included in any Whitney Biennial while still living in the state of South Carolina.”

Mullen goes on to explain that, “Inclusion in the Whitney show motivated me to take a year off teaching, rent three fifths of Andy Warhol’s former Factory studio and search diligently for representation in a New York gallery.” The litany of stories the artist has to tell about

Opposite: 'Mountain Lake'

Below: 'Koi in Fast Water'





his time in the Factory on Union Square are fascinating and often hilarious. In addition to building a shower in the kitchen he learned how to hotwire an elevator and turn on a furnace that was not supposed to be operated on weekends.

Mullen recalls this chapter of his life as frustrating and depressing as he struggled to get by as well as trying to “get in a gallery.” But in 1975, David Findlay Galleries, on Madison Avenue near 77th Street, included Mullen’s work in their gallery and mounted the artist’s first solo exhibition with them in February 1976—the first contemporary American artist to show at Findlay. Arts Magazine, a respected monthly journal in publication from 1926 – 1992, did the first of a number of articles about Mullen’s work based on this very exhibit.

Two years later, the Dubins Gallery in Los Angeles invited Mullen to join them, leading to representation in 11 different galleries throughout the country by the 1980s. “Findlay and Dubins accounted for 80 to 90 percent of my sales at the time so I focused on their galleries’ needs,” Mullen says. “Findlay had sales worldwide and mounted 14 solo exhibits of my work during the 35 years I was with them, a relationship that lasted until 2010 when all the Findlay family members who could run the gallery ultimately died.”

Among the private collections in which an original Philip Mullen painting could be found are those of Neil Diamond, Pleasant Rowland, and Crown Prince Fadio Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia. Despite the glitz and glamour of a celebrity purchase, Mullen says he prefers recalling the sale of one of his paintings

to a collector whose name he doesn’t remember but whose circumstances he does. This gentleman asked the gallery to hold a painting for two weeks until he made sure he could purchase a certain piece of land. He then paid for the painting under the condition that Findlay Gallery hold it for a year and a half while he built a house on the aforementioned land with a wall specifically designed for that painting. “The commitment in that case was greater than in any of the celebrity purchases,” Mullen says.

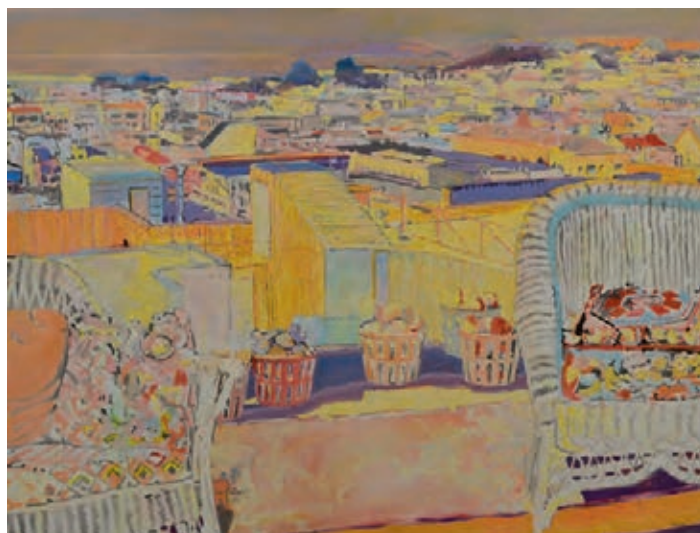
Looking Within a Philip Mullen Painting

What is it about a Philip Mullen painting that viewers find so fascinating?

Like many artists, Mullen carries on something of a conversation with his art, communicating via paint and brush strokes and always eager to interpret how the canvass responds. But unlike most artists, the dialog between Mullen and his art can go on for weeks, months, years, and even decades.

“I do not think the state of being finished is definite,” the artist says. “The painting and I might have a conversation and think we are done, but the next day one of us thinks of something that further develops it, so we continue. One painting, which is now in a private collection, was finished three times.” Each iteration of the painting was printed in a different publication.

The proper term for this additive, paint-over-paint-over-paint technique is *pentimento*, a word derived from the Italian word for repentance, which essentially describes the end result when an artist changes their



Left: 'For Two Friends'
Opposite: 'Light in Dark'







mind about the direction of a painting and reworks it by painting over the original art. However it is not that Mullen is indecisive as an artist, but that he enjoys the evolutionary quality of revisiting and continuing to work on his projects. One such painting is titled “Jane’s View.” It is a six by ten-foot painting that was 44 years in the making and finished more than once.

In any given Philip Mullen painting the viewer may see evidence of artifacts from previous iterations. These ghosts or relics in the art lend a timeless quality and a unique sense of depth that no other method can duplicate. Mullen admits that he has carried the process of pentimento to “an extreme that probably goes beyond the normal use of the term.” He continues, “In simple language, I just keep painting until it seems I can carry it no further. Even then I will come back and develop a formerly ‘finished’ painting if it seems it might get stronger.”

Mullen tells the story of a collector who described hanging one of the artist’s paintings next to a pop art painting in their home. The collector relayed that once the painting was installed they seemed to only be able to see the other painting for the first few weeks, but that when they ultimately looked deeply at the Mullen piece they never saw the other painting again.

“This,” according to Mullen, “is the core of why building a painting is so important to me.” Mullen builds his paintings for long-term, lasting relationships between the collector and the art and, while he celebrates the many prestigious museums that own his work and the many visitors who will get to see it, “I make my paintings for the same people to see day after day and year after year.”

“Sometimes people ask me why I don’t keep a painting in its original finished form and make a new one that resembles the second or third way the painting is finished, but it can’t be done,” he explains. “It would be like having someone start life at age 20 and expect them to be the same as if they had started at age zero. Those early experiences, like the early marks on my paintings, influence how the work develops.”

“At the core of meaning in my paintings is the opportunity to experience looking deep into them,” Mullen says.

Mullen shares a conversation he once had with acclaimed figurative artist, Sigmund Abeles, who was born in New York in 1934 but grew up in South Carolina. “Isn’t it great to be one of the long timers?” Abeles said to which Mullen responds, “It is hard to make art into old age, and even harder to keep inventing and not just copying yourself. At age 80, having the nerve to try new things, to be influenced by energetic younger artists, and to keep painting is pretty compelling.”

Columbia, SC will continue to claim Philip Mullen as one of our greatest as long as we possibly can.



Left: *‘Three Paintings in Progress’*
Opposite: *‘Remembering Matisse’*





From Wire to Clay, Bohumila Augustinova Shapes Her Future

*By Christina Xan
Photos by Sean Rayford*

Bohumila Augustinova is a name Jasper audiences have likely heard before. In the time since moving to South Carolina in 1998, Augustinova has served as Manager of the beloved Anastasia and Friends gallery that closed its doors in 2019, has worked for the Columbia Arts Center as first the Arts and Culture Specialist and now the Recreational Program Coordinator, and has shown her own work as an artist in various media.

For a while, Augustinova was known for her wire creations, almost magically able to manipulate wire like thread and weaving it to create delicate sculptures. However, when Augustinova started her position as Arts



Tuula Widdifield. Having almost reached her limit while throwing on the wheel, Augustinova remembers the moment everything clicked.

“[Widdifield] walked over to me and watched my hands for about 20 seconds, and she said, ‘Oh, I see the problem. You just move your hands off the clay too fast. Just loosen up the pressure and very slowly move your hands,’” Augustinova describes. “And I did. And I was like, wow. That was just that moment.”

For quite some time, Augustinova had wondered if she and clay would just be “acquaintances,” but after this, she was hooked. She began throwing every day and at every opportunity she could. When the pandemic hit, throwing became a solace for her, and her wheel became a haven to return to.

At first, she played around mixing her long-term favorite medium with her new one, integrating wire throughout clay sculptures. However, during this time of play, a technique she found in a workshop would unexpectedly emerge as her signature style.

Shortly before the pandemic, Augustinova had taken a sgraffito workshop. Sgraffito is a surface decoration technique where color is applied on clay, and designs are carved though the color, exposing the clay underneath. Essentially, once Augustinova finishes throwing a piece and lets it dry for around 24 hours, she uses brushes to paint on her underglaze. Then she can ‘scratch’ out any design she desires and place it in the kiln.

Augustinova shares that when she first decided to try sgraffito at home, she thought about her childhood sketches: “I think what I think about most is the stationary phone at my parents’ house, where there was a big notepad, and you could always tell if my dad or I was the last one on the phone.” One of these doodles, a seemingly random arrangement of lines and curves, would follow her through the corners of notebooks into her pottery, piece after piece.

Sometimes, Augustinova has a clear image of how she wants a piece to look and takes to the wheel to create it, almost plucking it from the clouds of her mind and materializing it in front of her. Other times, she simply gets lost, just moving her hands back and forth until she births a new idea.

Over the pandemic, Augustinova honed this skill more and more, practicing different colors, carving depths, and patterns. She shared her work on social media and, after a positive reception, started sharing it in shows too. It didn’t take long for her to realize she needed

and Culture Specialist, she wanted to become familiar with all aspects of the art methodologies offered at the Center. One of the most common mediums? Clay.

Augustinova recalls the challenge of first working with clay—specifically throwing on the wheel—saying it was like nothing she had experienced before: “Working with clay is fantastic challenge because clay is unpredictable. It will do whatever it wants to do. There’s a lot of trust and respect between me and the clay.”

However, she was committed to the challenge, to the literal and figurative push-pull relationship clay asked her to have. This challenge came to a head when she signed up for a Creative Throwing workshop with



a brand, and that's when her partner, fellow artist (and former president of the Jasper Project board of directors), Barry Wheeler, suggested Bohu.

"Growing up, back in my country, nobody called me Bohumila. Everybody called me Bohu," she shares, "When I asked Barry why Bohu he said, 'four letter words are memorable, and it's who you are.' It's perfect. It really is."

In recent months, Augustinova has shown Bohu in festivals like Keenan Terrace and Melrose Art in the Yards, and now she is beginning to apply to larger showcases like Art Fields. She has a vast inventory of bowls, vases, and mugs, but she wants to start focusing on crafting larger sculptural works.

This makes sense as her favorite pieces to make are ones as large as possible, constantly pushing the limits.

She emphasizes that one of the most magical and emotional experiences is seeing a large piece come out of the kiln: "There has been more than one time when I am waiting for the kiln to be cool enough so I can open it, and I finally open it and see it and am just standing there with my tears."

Though she has goals for the future, she intimates that she is content. She goes to work and spends time with clay, and she comes home to it as well. She has formed a life within it—though she does assure us that she and wire are simply "on a break."

With clay, as with her life, there has always had to be a balance, and in the past few years, Augustinova has found hers in both. On whatever wheel she is thrown, she has her hands deep in the clay, ready to center.



Sound Practitioner Dick Moons Would Rather Be Heard than Seen

Words and Images by Kristine Hartvigsen

Dick Moons came down from the mountaintop with new enlightenment. The next, perhaps unlikely, stop — a TJ Maxx store — where he bought his first drum. Since then, the self-taught drum circle facilitator and sound artist has amassed a vast collection of percussion instruments that he relishes sharing with people in the community.

“It started at the Lake Eden Arts Festival (LEAF in Black Mountain, NC). I had heard about the festival from friends. It was kid-friendly, so I brought the kids,” he says. “The first night, I settled the kids in our tent. I had heard about a drum circle and decided to check it out. There was a mountain trail about a half-mile up from the campgrounds. As I walked it, I could gradually hear the drums. It was indistinct at first, like a motor humming. I started to see this glow ahead of me. There was a great fire in the middle of about 200 people. Someone let me play their drum that night. I was blown away.”

The experience was so captivating that he stayed all night, drumming until his hands were bruised, returning to his campsite at dawn. “I brought the kids to the drum circle the next night. They made instant friends.”

Back in Columbia, while attending the Unitarian Universalist Church (the UU), a program director, Susan Corbett, saw that Moons had a gift and recruited him to work with children.

“She was an ambassador of West African drumming in Columbia,” he said. Through that relationship, he met drum teacher Laura Rich, who brought many drumming guests from Guinea, who also taught. Moons says that is when he “really learned to play.”

During that time at the UU, Moons met other folks who would be keenly influential to his development as a percussionist, educator, and community servant.

“That is where I met (award-winning documentary maker) Lee Ann Kornegay and (community activist) Leslie Miner, who became his drumming partners spanning many ensembles over the years, from Borenya to the Next Door Drummers to the Columbia Community Drum Circle. “I consider Lee Ann one of my mentors,” he says.

“I love the guy! We have been playing together — not just drums but in LIFE for many years,” Kornegay says. “Dick is full throttle in all his play. He engages in soulful and meaningful things, such as music, nature, friends, family, and culture. His recent exploration of sounds to soothe and heal is wonderful. Have you seen all of his instruments?! A truth sayer, thoughtful and a man of many talents, he is the perfect hippie and a cherished friend.”

In the late ‘90s, Kornegay found herself drawn to the artform after seeing West African drummers perform at USC. In the years that followed, she not only took up the instrument but traveled multiple times to Côte d’Ivoire to work and study the culture. She described it as life-changing.

Soon after honing his skills with West African teachers and local drumming enthusiasts, Moons landed his first gig, at Still Hopes Retirement Community, where the activities director asked him to arrange an interactive drumming session for residents.

“I only had one drum. I borrowed drums from everybody. I had no idea what I was doing,” he says. “The lady at Still Hopes said she had never seen the residents react to anything like that.”

Bolstered by that feedback, Moons began exploring the idea of facilitating workshops for people of all ability levels. He gradually began to acquire more drums and other percussion instruments so people could actively participate even if they didn’t own an instrument. In addition to drums, he offers a tub of rhythm gadgets such as castanets, maracas, wood blocks and guiros, chimes, gongs, tambourines, and hand-held sleighbells. The added sounds make the drum circle more diverse and dynamic, Moons explains.

While the African djembe is his first and favorite drum, he realized that djembes can be large and heavy, not ideal for very young learners, the physically challenged, or senior citizens.

“I am always thinking about those with physical challenges,” he says. “So I got a grant and bought some Remo drums from a company in California. The nested drums are easy to transport and much lighter than his conventional djembes. Today he has more than 50 usable

drums. “I have accumulated these over time and added to the collection over the years.”

Retired from what he calls “The Phone Company,” Moons has been focusing on drum work for about 17 years now, having started five years before retiring in 2011. Most recently, he has added concentrated sound therapy to his repertoire, regularly facilitating vibroacoustic sound therapy in the salt cave at Shvaas Spa in Columbia.

This form of sound therapy uses low frequency sound waves and therapeutic music to bring relief to people who may be suffering from chronic pain, anxiety, addiction, ADHD, and other medical issues. Studies from the National Institutes of Health have concluded that vibroacoustic sound therapy is effective in mitigating many conditions, either in lieu of prescription medication or in combination with it.

“I use traditional Tibetan and Christian singing bowls and a variety of percussion instruments such as gongs, chimes, Native American flutes, and the Handpan (a form of steel drum), to create a therapeutic soundscape,” Moons explains. “After I completed some intensive training, I became mindful about what works well together. It’s a constantly shifting thing, the instruments that I use.”

Participants in the sessions, which can run from 45 minutes to 90 minutes, describe emerging with a sense of relaxation and cleansing. Sometimes the experience can draw out unexpected emotions, Moons notes, and he has seen people cry afterward, even sharing personal stories. Massage therapists observe such responses with hands-on, tactile therapy. Similarly, sound therapy can be described as an vibratory, acoustic “massage.”

For centuries, healers and shamans have recognized sound and vibration as vehicles to help people find mind/





body balance. Methods can include music, chanting, and the use of instruments.

“Through the chanting and music and drumming, you are creating magic. You are raising spirit,” says longtime friend and drum circle co-conspirator Miner. “In many indigenous cultures, the shamanistic work has always involved sound. I always felt, with the drum circle, the sense that we are going to raise spirits. It’s like no church you’ve ever been to.”

To meet Moons, one gets the sense they are in the company of a pure spirit, a compassionate soul, and even a shaman of sorts. He is an earthy, proverbial tree-hugging lover of life who truly feels a calling to help others. As a retiree (semi, anyway), Moons volunteers his time to many community events, seeking no compensation other than the privilege of being part of something joyful and bigger than himself. On a regular basis, he can be spotted doing all manner of grunt work to support events like the Jam Room Music Festival, JerryFest, and Mardi Gras fundraisers.

“I am an extravert. ... I enjoy it. I have made some good friends working on the Krewe. It’s just a fun day,” he says. “Being part of something that is a gift to the community, I like doing that sort of stuff.”

Oddly enough, despite all the meditative therapies he administers, Moons finds it extremely difficult to be idle.

He is a voracious, curious soul who, when not helping at community events or facilitating workshops, is constantly exploring the beauty of nature, often discovering sights that lie hidden beyond the forest path.

“The irony of doing this work is that I am the worst meditator. Ever!” he says. “I don’t sit still well. ... As I work, I find myself getting lost in the sound. It is quieting to your mind. Maybe I am doing this as much for me as for anybody else. It’s a humbling thing. I feel gratitude.”



At the Bookstore

By Ruth Nicholson

I'm like a child with a chestnut—
anticipating words still in their husk,
eager to release them and run
my fingers over their smooth, ruddy skins.

Ruth Nicholson, retired from Richland Library, spends time with poetry and the ever-astonishing natural world. Her poems have appeared in The Cresset, Passages North, Point, Jasper Magazine, Fall Lines – a literary convergence, and Emrys Journal.

There Will Be Beaches

By Len Lawson

for tourists.

We live on a graveyard arrowhead
where the Gullah battle haints and hags
and spirits of indigenous tribes
hover to claim what is theirs.

Yes, there will be time for beaches
and on one in Charleston, my people
were buried and buried themselves
and walked on the ocean
until it became their bodies.

Yes, those flags still droop here
and polished statues under them salute.
Bones gather 'round their feet
for the re-enactments their sons crave.

They kick the bones on their way
to their sacrifice of burnt offerings
from praying hands rubbed
over burning churches.

Yes, come for the sunshine
peeling your flesh,
stay for the smiles and hospitality,
but don't forget the echo and chant
of bones under your feet.

*Len Lawson is the author of *Negro Asylum for the Lunatic Insane* (Main Street Rag, 2023), in which this poem appears, and *Chime* (Get Fresh Books, 2019). 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). Len earned the 2018 inaugural NC Poetry Society Susan Laughter Meyers Poetry Fellowship, the 2020 SC Academy of Authors Carrie McCray Nickens Fellowship in Poetry, and the 2022 Fresh Voices in the Humanities Governor's Award from SC Humanities. He has a Ph.D. in English Literature and Criticism from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Born and living in South Carolina, he is currently Assistant Professor of English at Newberry College.*



OLGA YUKHNO

A Russian Transplant with a Passion for Her Work

*By Ginny Merett
Photos by Sean Rayford*

Passion, courage, and innovative spirit—these are the qualities most anyone might use to describe visual artist Olga Yukhno. But we had no idea there was so much more to this versatile Columbia-based artist, and we had a great time learning how much there is to know!

Born in Pyatigorsk, a mountainous resort area in southern Russia, Yukhno has lived in South Carolina for 15 years and now lives in Columbia with her husband, Matt Norris. Her family still lives in her home country where, before Covid and the war in Ukraine, she would visit them yearly, but now she has rarely visited them over the last three years. Her family is safe but suffers psychologically and

emotionally due to the proximity of the war. She also has relatives who are refugees in Kiev, living amidst power outages and air raid alerts. This pains the artist greatly, but she is devoted to working through the stress of an embattled homeland by immersing herself in her art.

Yukhno's work is an amalgam of three-dimensional ceramic and mixed media pieces, figurative sculpture, and larger scale installation works often influenced by her degree in psychology and her travels around the world. Traveling, she says, "changes her as a person." Exposed to world-class museum experiences through her travels, she prefers backpacking and staying with locals so she can learn to understand their culture firsthand. Yukhno says she learns to trust people more by witnessing their kindness all over the world and considers this beneficial to her art and her desire to express deeper meaning in her work.

Always eager to tackle sensitive psychological and social issues in her work, Yukhno does investigative research which enables her to present a thorough and accurate narrative about her subjects. She is often influenced by people close to her. One of her ongoing 5-year installation projects addresses dementia, a project she began when her best friend's mother was diagnosed with the disease. She hopes to give a voice to the caretakers who she believes do not talk enough about the isolation they experience as they care for their loved ones. "Caretakers dedicate so much and neglect their own needs, [sometimes even] passing away from not taking care of themselves." She says people are so uncomfortable talking about dementia and hopes her art will be an impetus to activate that needed conversation.

Yukhno uses clay and incorporates found objects into her pieces, admitting that her style is eclectic and impossible to describe because it is ever changing. While she is working in three different directions presently, her desire for permanent public art of mainly sculptural pieces, murals, and large mosaics is her number one focus right now. Installations are her second favorite interest as they help her express many of her ideas about social commentary as well as psychological issues. "Art is the best way to express the way I want to say something," she says. She also wants to work on larger sculptures mainly to challenge herself as an artist. "I like to create different work...when I produce heavy (psychological) work, I'll work on something that is fun and free at the same time. It makes me sad to work on heavy things all the time," she shares.

A multimedia artist, she enjoys using found objects, glass, mosaics, fibers, and most recently pine needles in her sculptures. Fascinated with basket weaving, (she learned how to weave from Clay Burnett, whose work was covered in an earlier issue of Jasper Magazine), she has a new series of busts that are topped with pine straw crowns and headdresses, calling the work, "architectural pieces." Her desire to work with contrasts comes out in these pieces as the earthiness of the pine needles contrast to the polished look of the glazed clay suggesting an "organic floor of forest." This dichotomy is what brings her the most satisfaction.

She also uses her experiences in metal and woodworking by making her own tools. To Yukhno, making her tools provides a sense of freedom, giving her a way to create her art more efficiently. "I like efficiency. I like to do things the best way possible and find the most efficient way. And finding tools to help me do that gives me a whole other level of pride. I can make exactly what I need and like," she says.

A full time, professional artist, Yukhno teaches sculpture classes at Columbia Art Center where she says she feels

very comfortable." It's my happy place," she says. She teaches and shares her passion with new students who have never done sculpture before and loves getting the chance to work with people and their discoveries.

Yukhno has plans on the horizon to produce a piece about Russia and Ukraine. She describes how it is too painful to comprehend now, but too important to ignore. "If we don't talk about what is painful who will? It's partially the job of an artist to show subjects that are too painful to talk about. It is a way of expressing our thoughts and sometimes people may understand it better."

She also plans on using more technology involving sound and projections in her installations or incorporating 3D printing in her work. She wishes to collaborate with other artists because she enjoys the challenge of working with others to problem solve. "I enjoy making things partnering with someone," she says. She recently did just that for Southern Exposure through the USC Music Department for a performance by Sympatico Percussion



Image courtesy of Kathryn Van Aernum



Group. She was asked to create a body of work about the Parkland shooting. She appreciated the challenge and was complimented when the composer purchased the piece for his collection since it correlated with his music. No wonder Yukhno says such productivity often produces burn out. She says she struggles with balance as a person and an artist. She says she can work 12 to 16 hours a day and then be wiped out for a week. She is involved with various arts organizations and often overextends herself. "Being a responsible person is often a detriment to my work and personal wellbeing," she admits. "I'm learning to take my time and let it simmer instead of jumping in." Some of her favorite artists are also her favorite people. Her first mentor, Russian Nikolai Vdovlein, is a world renown artist who "supported and believed in me," says Yukhno. Other artists from the US include figurative sculpture artist Lisa Clague and sculpture Christina Kosiba from NC. She treasures the relationships with artists from the Midlands Clay Arts Society and with Columbia based figurative artist Lucy Bailey who first offered her a sculpture class. She also mentions Clay Burnette as friend and mentor for his wonderful artistry, dedication to his art form, and willingness to share his knowledge.

Yukhno believes there is a "ton of talent" in the Columbia art scene, but she would like to see more affordable

exhibition spaces available to both well established and emerging artists. "I'm extremely sad that Tapp's Arts Center and Southern Pottery closed," she says. She believes it is important to recognize cultural leaders in the community and adds that we "need to be more supportive of each other....cooperate among the different organizations." She would love to see more partnership between organizations and hopes the art scene will move in that direction in the future.

Yukhno believes the media downplays the war in Ukraine and especially the conditions in Russia. She wishes the plight in Russia drew more attention in the US noting that the living conditions of most Russians have deteriorated, and the independent free media has been substituted with propaganda. She believes good organizations in support of Ukraine exists but says that the "journalistic landscape has been cleared out," causing hopelessness "Newspaper and other independent journalists are almost refugees," she says, unable to do their jobs. Yukhno encourages people to become educated about the situation in Russia and Ukraine and support independent media in Russia. She hopes that an independent means of communication will be available to Russian people before too long and artists in Russia will be able to enjoy the pleasure of following their own callings soon.

In A Pooka in Arkansas, Poet Ed Madden Reclaims the Role of Outcast

By Evelyn Berry

In his fifth poetry collection *A Pooka in Arkansas*, selected by Timothy Liu for the Hilary Tham Capital Collection from Word Works Books, Ed Madden reflects on his rural upbringing, reimagines childhood stories, and reaps notions of lineage, gender, and animal instincts.

Familiar stories— whether of fairytale creatures like the Big Bad Wolf, biblical figures such as Esau or Ruth, pop culture characters, or abstract personas (the circus animals trapped in the cage of an Animal Crackers tin)— allow Madden to explore a psychological terrain of repressed sexuality, uncertain masculinity, and unspoken shame. The eponymous Pooka (or púca), Madden’s recurring character or motif, is a mischievous animal spirit in Celtic lore, a fairy-like changeling that in Madden’s verse acts as a queer interloper in his rural Arkansas landscape, at times alluding to Madden’s father, mysterious men met while cruising, or Madden himself, having become his family’s still-living ghost story.

What remains of familial legacy is shared not through moral instruction in parables, however, but instead reconsidered in poems about burning fields, dying fathers, and forlorn longing, ordinary rural scenes transformed by original metaphor, the senses of scent and touch, and prayer-like alliterative litany (“ridden, riddled, riven”). Madden asserts that he is “not someone who goes home anymore” while returning home in his poetry again and again. *A Pooka in Arkansas* is his not-homecoming, an attempt to “try to call home again” (“Eclipse”), in which he instead reanimates his past on his own terms.

Madden’s poems often rely on the logic of personal metaphor: “Sunset is a glowing butt your dad tosses from his truck” in “Country of origin,” the same father, in “Burning the fields,” later worn “like a denim shirt.” The objects that relate Madden’s worldview are not generic, but rather exist as details within his actual world. Where metaphor fails, Madden affects a reflexive gesture approximate to tautological mirroring: “the field smelled

like a field”; “the pighthouse was just that, a pighthouse”; “my mother’s face is my mother’s face.” When rhetorical language is insufficient to revive memory, the poet must simply name what is nameable.

A Pooka in Arkansas follows Madden’s previous four collections *Ark* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2016), *Nest* (Salmon Poetry, 2014), *Prodigal: Variations* (Lethe Press, 2011), and *Signals* (University of SC Press, 2008) and asks questions familiar in his oeuvre: how does one carve a life in the liminal space between ancestral home and found family, between memory and intentional amnesia, between masculine and feminine, between sexuality and shame, between violence and desire, between mourning and relief? Madden remains in conversation with his past work, as well as a lineage of gay and Irish and Southern poets from whom he has inherited myriad, entangled poetic traditions.

The Hilary Tham Capital Collection features full-length works from poets notable for their volunteer contributions to literary communities, a fitting honor for the outgoing first poet laureate of Columbia, South Carolina. During Madden’s tenure, which recently ended after eight years, he launched public poetry projects in unexpected places including hospital waiting rooms, city bus windows, pharmacy prescription bags, parking tickets, LGBTQ resource centers, coffee sleeves, and postcards. Ed Madden engages, on and off the page, in the poetics of place, whether South Carolina, Arkansas, or Ireland. His poems seem in perpetual search for home in the mire of memory, in the process of therapy, in the language of music, in the company of friends, in his husband’s scarred hands, in the fresh-turned Arkansas land.



Libby Bernardin's *House In Need of Mooring*

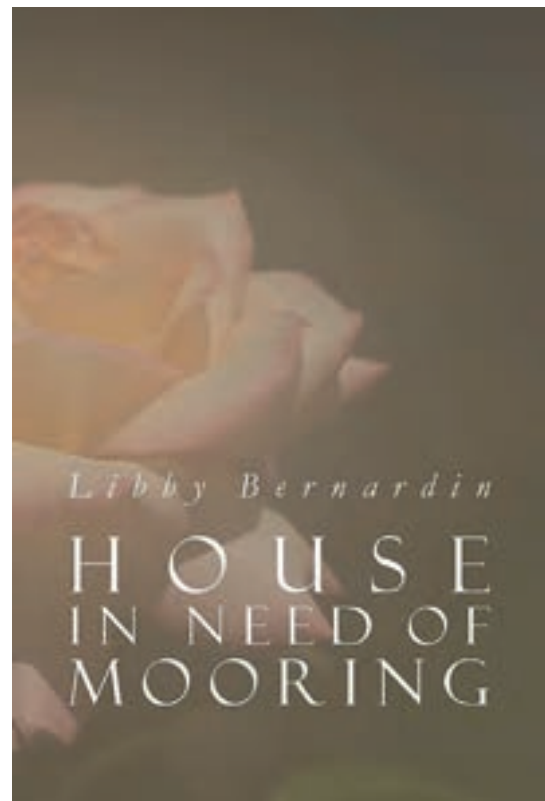
By Randy Spenser

Libby Bernardin's *House in Need of Mooring* (Press 53, 2022) is an outstanding collection of poetry spanning the lifetime of an accomplished poet. The title comes from a line in "1944," a poem which introduces us to her earliest childhood years, the house where "I want to be," near the marsh grass, the oyster midden, in sight of tugboats in the bay, but the reverie of those memories is broken by the need at night to pull down black-out shades to hide from submarines.

Throughout the collection, the reader is guided through a natural world filled with sea turtle hatchlings scatter-walking to the sea or a blue heron and snowy egret who want for nothing in the marsh at sunset. She delights in the small animals, the fiddler crabs scuttling across the mud or the caterpillar munching on parleys, and in the colorful penta's flowers drawing the hummingbird. Still, even from the first poem, when she lets us see the cleansing neap tides, the black-eyed Susans unbending from the soil, the wind will then rouse darker sounds that resonate, the trending noise of cars, of trucks, and, horrifyingly contemporary, the image of a knee pressed against the neck.

In poem after poem Bernardin recalls the awe and wonder she has witnessed all her life, but, like Wordsworth, she sees childhood as a dream from which the adult awakes. In a moving poem, she deals with a friend and fellow poet's untimely death. In "And What Is It I have Forgotten to Forgive, This Smear of Dark Cloud Lingerin'," she writes of the wisdom of the barred owl on the lawn under the oak,

He measures my mind knowing my question
After dreaming of my friend the one and only
Time in these two empty years



*He measures my mind knowing my question
After dreaming of my friend the one and only
Time in these two empty years*

revealing at the end, her “clotted loss of joy,” and you can hear Wordsworth saying, Now, while the birds sing a joyous song / To me alone there came a thought of grief.”

There are poems about other times, times of unfettered happiness, such as in “My Mother-in-Law Meets the Pope,” a time when the whole family took a trip to Rome for the investiture of her husband’s cousin as a Cardinal. While she is off climbing the Spanish Steps, she imagines the older woman in an audience with the Pontiff, inquiring whether he “likes chicken with polenta—and explaining her own recipe / a little onion in butter—ah, Bena, bena!”

There are poems of nostalgia that remember the South Carolina Lowcountry as it once was. “On the Road to Charleston Before the Now of Today” describes how in the distant past, Awendaw and McClellanville were unknown backwater towns, and how driving further on she would race from the car to the scent of frying shrimp at the one restaurant at the foot the Grace Memorial bridge.

Bernardin tells us of the important places from a long life, at one point writing, “Love brought me back to this place,” giving us the river’s scent, the taste of salty sea air, and then how the church she was married in has been, “re-modeled—the door I entered on my wedding day now / the back,” calling all of it her “left-behind longing.”

In the last poem, Bernardin addresses her art directly, “You, Poetry / what have you done with leaves’ green tremble,” questioning the inadequacy of her art. “Who cares about indigo,” in the face of riots, disease, racism, as she had asked at the beginning of the book, how am I

“entitled to this peaceful morning?” These are wise and powerful poems, full of the wonderous joy all around, but betraying the point where the irresistible joyous forces of childhood sometimes meet the immovable objects of the modern world. There are poems here for new readers and for those us who have followed the poet over the years. Reading these poems will draw you into her world. You won’t want to leave.

A Note from the reviewer. Ages ago (I’m being deliberately vague here), Libby and I were classmates in James Dickey’s “Poetry Composition” at the University of South Carolina. A few days before being asked to write this review, I was doing the long-overdue chore of cleaning out my office, and I uncovered a mimeographed packet of poems Dickey had distributed in class. All the efforts were pretty embarrassing, or would be to the “poets” who submitted them. I emailed Libby the first quatrain of her poem, and she was dutifully aghast. It was great to read her new book and laugh at how clumsy we all were in the beginning—and watch the evolution of a significant voice.

*The reviewer is the author of *The Color After Green* (Finishing Line Press, 2019) and the forthcoming *Andersonville: The Poem* (Muddy Ford Press, 2023).*

RADICAL CAROLINA

A Film About the First Integration of USC



context of the long struggle for educational equity in the United States. The racial integration of the University of South Carolina was the capstone of the egalitarian political agenda in the most radical state in the post-emancipation nation.

Founded in the new capital city of Columbia in 1801 to bring together lowcountry and upcountry planters, South Carolina College (renamed the University of South Carolina in 1865) trained the leadership of the most belligerently proslavery state. The school was adjacent to the state house, and at antebellum commencement ceremonies the college president led each graduating senior by the hand from the stage of the college chapel to the front row of seats for introductions to the leading politicians, planters, merchants, and ministers of South Carolina. At the 1860 convention that initiated secession across the Lower South, 44% of the delegates were alumni. The school's influence reached beyond the state not only through the migration of South Carolinians but more importantly through the circulation of ideas. Graduates and faculty members played leading roles in developing the antebellum argument that slavery was a "positive good" rather than a moral dilemma. Sixteen graduates of the college served in the Confederate Congress from six different states, and at least twenty-three former students became Confederate generals.

The desegregation of the University of South Carolina was the fullest reversal of the old order. The seminary of the planter elite became a model of biracial democracy. After the Civil War, with the establishment of Black voting rights, South Carolina - the state with the highest proportion of African Americans in its population - became a progressive stronghold. It was the only state where African Americans comprised the majority of delegates in a Reconstruction constitutional convention and the only state in which African Americans comprised the majority in a legislative chamber. This political power translated into distinctive policies. For example, South Carolina adopted an innovative program to foster Black ownership of land, and the state constitution of 1868 prohibited racial discrimination in public accommodations and schools. Black access to the university followed from legislative election of a

When we South Carolinians face our history, we often cringe. As we are well aware, our state was the first to secede from the Union. It is the birthplace of Dixiecrat presidential candidate Strom Thurmond and home of the Corridor of Shame. And there's more, of course... But one source of pride for the Palmetto State is not well known – the first integration of the University of South Carolina during Reconstruction in 1873.

USC was the only Southern state university to desegregate before the 1960s.

I recently received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to complete research and development on a film about the Reconstruction University entitled *Radical Carolina*. The film will tell the story of the 1873-77 integration of USC, which has been called the most dramatic initiative in the integration of American higher education after the Civil War. *Radical Carolina* places the story in the

board of trustees that reflected the racial composition of the state. More than mere local developments, these initiatives assumed nation-wide importance as leading illustrations of the promise of Reconstruction.

The institution that had served as the premier academy of proslavery secession became the first public university to employ a Black faculty member, Richard Greener, and the most historically prominent school to enroll large numbers of Black students in the years after the Civil War. The university and the State Normal School, which enrolled mainly women, trained an extraordinary cohort of Black political, religious, educational, and business leaders. The legislature completely eliminated tuition and fees, including rooming charges. The costs of attendance were mostly for meals and books, and the legislature created scholarships to help students meet those expenses. The scholarships were awarded by competitive examinations, and to avoid undue concentration of resources in the most privileged areas of the state, the scholarships were distributed across all counties in proportion to legislative representation.

The end of Reconstruction in South Carolina, deeply entwined with the presidential election of 1876, typifies the ways in which the state story became the heart of the national story. After the outgoing Grant administration and incoming Hayes administration refused to intervene in the campaign of fraud and violence through which Democrats claimed control of the South Carolina governorship and legislature, Governor Wade Hampton ordered the closure of the university in May 1877. The legislature soon eliminated the State Normal School entirely. All faculty members were dismissed without back pay, and students were left to seek alternative arrangements. Greener became the dean of the law school at Howard University.

When the University of South Carolina reopened after a three-year hiatus, it was again a school for whites only. The institution worked to erase the memory of the Reconstruction era. Students in the debate societies tore out or defaced pages in their records. The university history published by a professor in 1916 omitted the era of integration from the main narrative, treating it in a brief appendix which concluded that the biracial school was “a fraud upon the taxpayers.” The alumni society annually presented a gold-tipped cane to the oldest living graduate until it learned in 1936 that the oldest-living graduate was an African American who had graduated in 1876, whom the society declined to recognize. The closure of the school after the violent

overthrow of Reconstruction ended racial integration at the University of South Carolina for almost a century, but African Americans firmly remembered the inspiring, fragile period of achievement as they continued to struggle for equality, a struggle that endures today.

As part of the research and development phase of *Radical Carolina*, we have completed production for a fundraising trailer, for which we have shot seven interviews and a series of reenactments. The interview subjects include USC professors Bobby Donaldson, Tom Brown and Christian Anderson, USC student activist Lyric Swinton, Bernie Powers of the Center for the Study of Slavery at the College of Charleston, Kate Masur of Northwestern University and Hilary Green of Davidson College. We shot the reenactments on campus and at the Pastor’s Study on Main Street in Columbia, thanks to Martha Fowler. The cast and crew were all people I’ve worked with before at SCETV and on my interactive website about Reconstruction history, *Reconstruction 360*— Deon Turner, Rayana Brigs, Patrick Dodds, Sam McWhite, Jocelyn Brannon, Katrina Blanding, Bradley Fuller, Desiree Cheeks, J.B. Marple, Shae Winston, and USC student Chris Myers. The amazing local filmmaker Steve Daniels shot the reenactments hand-held on Super 8mm color film, assisted by the equally amazing Lynn Cornfoot, and Jean Lomasto, costume designer extraordinaire dressed the actors, mostly veterans of Columbia theater. Local artist Paul Moore acquired or made all the props (edible and non-edible) P.A. Gil Grifaldo took care of the other production details with the help of USC student Casey Matthews. Historic Columbia, as the project’s fiscal sponsor, has provided financial accounting as well as beautiful locations for interviews.

I feel very fortunate to be part of the creative community here in Columbia, to know and collaborate with such talented people right here in my own backyard.

-Betsy Newman

Betsy Newman is a documentary film maker and web content developer at SCETV. Her films have been broadcast nationally, winning a Telly, a Cine Gold Eagle Award, and a Southeast Emmy.



Columbia's New Poet Laureate

Jennifer Bartell Boykin

by Kristine Hartvigsen
photos by Lester Boykin

When Jennifer Bartell's mother became ill with cancer, it was evident that she had a lot of company in the tightknit African American community of Bluefield in Johnsonville, SC.

"We started a list of people in the neighborhood who had either died of cancer or survived cancer. It was substantial," Bartell says. "I went back to that list and tried to figure out what was going on. Is it something in the well water or soil?"

That question led to months of inquiry and more unanswered questions. "I took soil samples and interviewed elders of the neighborhood. ... I worked

with a woman from DHEC (SC Department of Health and Environmental Control) who helped me to do testing on the well water. We tested three different wells. We found some dangerous chemicals but nothing definitive. We just knew that there was an extraordinary number of black people in that neighborhood who were dying of all different types of cancer."

Bartell desperately wanted to turn that research into something meaningful and, perhaps one day, legally admissible. She was working on her MFA thesis at the University of South Carolina at the time, and the two ideas merged.

"I rolled that research into a poetry book," she says. "I finished the MFA program in 2014 and started sending the book out. It would get rejected and I'd revise it and send it out again. And it would get rejected again, and I would revise it again. ... "

When she presented some of it at a writing workshop, the response kind of stung but turned out to be constructive after all.

“The feedback was that ‘No one wants to know about that (the soil testing and the science) stuff,’” she recalls. “They wanted to know more about the girl in the house by herself. They said I needed to get to the emotional center and essence of what I was trying to say, and it wasn’t just about what’s happening in Bluefield.”

With clarity on what she needed to do, Bartell removed much of her scientific research on water and soil sampling and refocused the book on the emotional journey of a young black girl who grew up in the South. She originally titled her book *Bluefield* but changed it to *Traveling Mercies*, which are prayers for safe travel.

“It’s like time traveling,” Bartell says. “The speaker in these poems is me, but it’s not me at the same time. It is autobiographical. This narrator is traveling with the elders of the community. We go through their history, the Middle Passage, my parents when they first married, traveling through my own personal history and my own grief.” Here is a brief excerpt from the title poem of her upcoming book:

Traveling Mercy

*In Memory of Goldie Graham, Blanche Lewis,
and Genethea Eaddy*

The Bluefield Griots plucked
me out of a jar before last breath
of prayer, buried me before birth:

This is how I time travel. I be seed
kept and passed, finger to palm,
planted and preserved for generations.

Recorded in the hulls are the movements,
the mournings, the joys. I listen
to the three Griots on the recording,

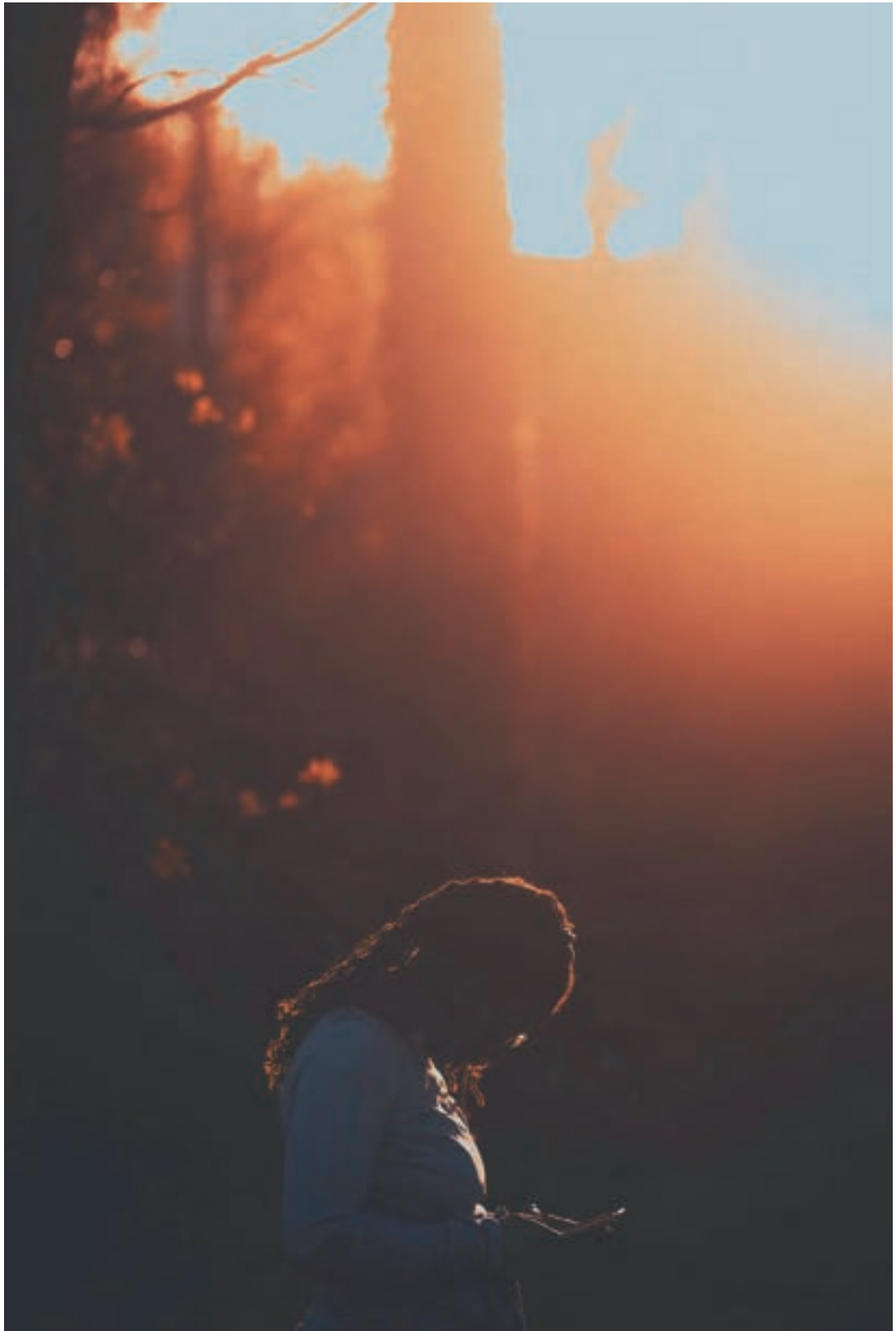
their one voice. These women-folk
with six bluing eyes that project
the gateway I need to bend ...

Bartell still plans to pursue publication of her research findings and interviews with community elders as a nonfiction book at some point. But for now, she is still processing the news late last year that she was selected to be the second Poet Laureate for the City of Columbia, succeeding the first Poet Laureate, Dr. Ed Madden, who served in that role for two consecutive 4-year terms. She plans to continue many creative and popular programs Madden started, such as *Poems on the Comet* (the city’s public bus system) and *Rain Poetry* (stenciled on public sidewalks and visible only when wet). Of course, Bartell would like to put her own stamp on the position and create a poetry festival for the city as well as literary activities that promote nonviolence.

It no doubt will be a struggle finding balance in Bartell’s already bustling professional and personal life. For her all-consuming “day job,” she teaches Creative Writing, Advanced Writing, and English 101 classes at Spring Valley High School in Richland County School District Two. She also sponsors the school’s Poetry Club. At the same time, she is working toward a master’s degree in Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina. This credential will augment her growing collection, which includes a bachelor’s from Agnes Scott College, a master’s in fine arts in Creative Writing and a certificate in Women’s and Gender Studies, also from USC.

Those who have taught full time know that the day does not end at 3 p.m. There is all manner of lesson planning, grading, and other duties to fit in before going home to assume the joyous but demanding role of parent. Bartell is married to Lester Boykin, an artist himself who is a gifted photographer and poet in his own right. The couple has two children, Marieta, 11, and Loman, who is still a curious and active toddler. Balancing all of these responsibilities with the commitments of the Poet Laureate will not be easy, but Madden already thought about that and developed an algorithm of sorts just for her.

“Ed came to my classroom with a document and a poet laureate desk plate,” Bartell recalls. “When this local poet laureate stuff started, Ed was the first in the state. Now there are all kinds of city and regional poets laureate. But Ed didn’t have a blueprint. That’s why it was important for him to give me advice and a tool with tips and pointers. He said, ‘get yourself a Bert, my partner and husband, someone supportive who has my back.’”



Lester Boykin is a spoken word artist, a form he describes as more theatrical, and performance based. With different styles, the two do not compete with one another. He recognizes this is her time to shine, and he is her biggest champion. In fact, poetry is what brought them together.

“We met at the Langston Hughes Poetry Center, at a poetry workshop that The Watering Hole put on,” he recalls. “It was my first poetry workshop. ... Later on, we went to Richland Library, where she read a poem about her father. It just blew me away. To this day, it is my favorite poem of hers.”

Boykin says Bartell inspires him to write more and to write often. Bartell is not one to be self-promotional, so adjusting to the highly public role of poet laureate will be a process. In the past, if she hesitated to attend an event or show, he would urge her to go because it is an opportunity to publicize her upcoming book.

“We have a very, very good family system. Any time somebody has something to do, we coordinate the calendar. There is really not a lot of conflict,” he says. “We are actually excited for each other.”

Bartell is committed to always carving out time for family and to decompress. She knows she must be sure to take care of herself, mind, and body.

“One thing I keep telling myself is that I am just one individual, and I can’t do everything. It’s OK to say no. I have a family. I am a full-time teacher. I have to be at school the majority of the time,” she says. “I am also an introvert. A lot of people don’t know that. So, I have to have time to be with myself and refocus and recenter. If not, I am no good to anyone.”

Is she a poet first or a teacher first? Bartell describes herself as a “poet-teacher.” They will always be inseparable parts of her identity.

“Being a practicing poet makes me a better teacher,” she says. “Talking about the writing process with students, I am speaking from experience. My writing life is directly connected to my teaching life.”

There is something about high school students that Bartell says she is just drawn to. She really enjoys this age group because they are trying to figure out who they

are. “They are not quite adults, but they aren’t still kids either. They can have a good understanding of poems. I am helping them navigate life. I can show them that this is something they can do. They can be writers. I get to show them what’s possible.”

Leaves Like Prayer

This is what leaves like a prayer:
The collard greens my father planted.

A collard is a cabbage that does not develop a heart.

Their green leaves are like hands
About to clasp in solemn devotion,
Arching towards the sun for a blessing.

My father sleeps in his grave.

And the collard greens he planted
Keep growing in his autumn garden.
The frost sweetens them
And the time comes to reap what dead
Hands have sown. My brother cuts
The green hands from the earth’s body.
The green prayers do not leave the black earth.

But here we are. At the table with turkey
And stuffing. Clasp our hands over
His greens drenched in hamhock juice.

We eat prayers.

This we do in remembrance of him.
Take. Eat. His love
Grown for you and me.

“Leaves Like Prayer” was first published in the Raleigh Review: Literary & Arts Magazine, Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall 2015. The poem will appear in the poetry collection Traveling Mercy, which Finishing Line Press will publish in November 2023.

TO THE ROOF OF THE GREENHOUSE

The Poetry Society of South Carolina in 2023

A personal essay by Tamara Miles, PSSC President

On March 30, 1922, poet Amy Lowell read at The Poetry Society of South Carolina in Charleston. As former president Jim Lundy notes in *The History of the Poetry Society of South Carolina*, Lowell's visit "set the record for attendance for a meeting of the Society."

Imagining that meeting from a hundred years' distance invigorates our hopes for the Society to fill the seats each month as we greet some of the most influential characters in poetry today. We did so in March with former Poet Laureate of Columbia, Ed Madden, who launched his new collection, *A Pooka in Arkansas*, to the delight of readers and listeners gathered at Gage Hall on Archdale Street in Charleston. We are grateful for the generosity of the Unitarian Church in allowing us that space.

The PSSC has had a long, proud, and sometimes troubled history, and we are very much still present on the streets of Charleston. However, our mission is

to serve the whole state, and for that reason, we have an initiative called Every Corner, Every County. As president, I am traveling to all the counties; in fact, I have already visited 22, meeting with librarians, poets, and other interested parties to create new poetry venues and strengthen existing ones. In Richland County, we have founded the Columbia Hub of the PSSC at The Living Room, an event space at 6729 Two Notch Road, hosted by Candace Chellew of Jubilee Circle Center for Spirituality and the Arts. Upcoming events there include readings and workshops with Evelyn Berry, who was awarded a 2023 National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship. (*Berry reviews Madden's book, A Pooka in Arkansas on page XX.*)

The poets of South Carolina are many, but due to inexperience or lack of alignment with some sense of what takes poetry to a higher level, they are neglected or siloed. We must lift them to the roof of the greenhouse, so to speak.

Those who know me are aware that I have a greenhouse at home, lovingly built for me by David Lemieux, that I call "The Church in the Greenhouse." There's a bench and chair inside, among the cabbage and lily bulbs, ferns and more, covered with books of poetry and about poetry. I love to share these resources, and I've created a Poet's Library at The Living Room that anyone can come and use or borrow from. With the help of such books as *The Poem's Heartbeat: A Manual of Prosody*, by Alfred Corn, or readings of beautiful poetry from established journals, it's easier to begin shaping and elevating one's craft.

I keep copies of the Poetry Society's annual Yearbooks nearby for frequent browsing and sharing. They go with me when I travel around the state so people can have a look. I also enjoy reading the president's letter that is always included. In 2014, Katherine Williams



wrote about the Society's continued educational support through our Skylark Prize, a program that is still going strong today. She also mentioned a monthly Writers' Group that had been a tradition for a hundred years. It fell away for a while during the pandemic, but it's back now under the leadership of Shayna Shanes, meeting at Bliss Spiritual Co-op in Mt. Pleasant every third Saturday at 10 a.m.

Please join us.

We are also reaching out to other publications and projects including Jasper, Fall Lines, Kakalak, and Al Black's Mind Gravy, hoping to work closely together to achieve the greater good for everyone.

Looking back at Katherine Williams' letter, I see that she also mentioned group readings at the Charleston VA Medical Center. I'm happy to tell you that we are again working with the Charleston VA, and now the VA in Augusta, to provide a poetry workshop for women veteran survivors of trauma. The first of these events is in April 2023. It came about because of my new kinship with the president of the Georgia Poetry Society, Lucinda Clark, an exceptionally talented and driven woman from whom I have much to learn. I believe our collaboration with other state societies is a benefit to all involved.

The Poetry Society of South Carolina is grateful to our members, contest sponsors, foundations, and in-kind contributors past and present who have sustained

and enriched our work. They are acknowledged in the Yearbook. We also appreciate the Charleston Library Society and the College of Charleston for hosting and housing our guest poets throughout the year.

I will end my sketch of the state of affairs at the PSSC with a request to poets and poetry lovers to add or renew your membership today and consider volunteering your time and talent across the state. Also, if you haven't read Lundy's intriguing history of this organization, please grab a copy and enjoy it. Our regular monthly programs and seminars are held at CLS, 164 King Street. Readings are at 7 p.m., free and open to the public; seminars are from 10-11:30 a.m., \$15 for non-members, \$10 for members, and students and Zoom attendees attend free. Zoom attendance is observation only (participation is at the discretion of the hosting poet). To find out more about our events, please visit PoetrySocietySC.org.

Membership fees range from student, \$15, to Sponsor, \$100. In addition to notices of monthly meetings, you will receive a copy of the Yearbook at the end of your membership year, with your name in the membership directory, the year's prize-winning poems, and guidelines for the Poetry Society's contests. Above all, you will enjoy the company, and we will treasure yours.

Let's fill the seats.



Fathers, Mothers, Catastrophe: Three Poets Debut Powerful Collections

by Zach Mueller

Three first books by remarkable new poets, all former students at USC, have come across our desks this year, each with their own connections to South Carolina—familial, ancestral, tenuous, illuminating. A day on Lake Hartwell and going out with your dad for burgers and a movie in Seneca. A grim stay at the Fort Jackson Inn. A childhood in the Upstate. Living in a coastal city where the vibrant activity screens out the real climate threat we face.

Both Maya Marshall and Brandon Rushton completed their MFA degrees at USC. Marshall says her graduate study allowed her to live and work near her maternal grandfather's relatives. Now teaching at Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina, Jayme Ringleb grew up in Clemson, where his mother lived, but moved to Columbia to attend USC, ultimately spending six years here, working at area restaurants and with SC Equality. Rushton says that a number of the poems in his new book are grounded in South Carolina, especially Charleston, poems he describes as “inspired by the motions of the people in a place in motion.” He was struck, he says, by “how the beauty of the place obscures the climate threat it faces and how it’s baffling to watch ourselves move through the place with that threat so far out of mind.

In his first reviews for Jasper, Zach Mueller writes about these remarkable new books. A Columbia native, Mueller published a poem over a decade ago in one of our first issues. It’s nice to have him back.

- EM



All the Blood Involved in Love Maya Marshall

(Haymarket Books, 2022)

Maya Marshall’s beautiful debut collection *All the Blood Involved in Love* positions the speaker as a caregiver fighting, against all odds, to claim the vulnerable body—as a woman, as a Black woman, as an American—as more than a wound waiting to happen. The speaker

recalls a memory of herself as a child looming over her sleeping father's neck, rising and falling into shape with each breath, with curiosity and a kitchen knife within arm's reach: "Tenderness is the impulse to protect / what you know you could destroy." These poems navigate race, family, lineage, violence (political and personal), illness, love and sexuality with the speaker's inclination to take wounded and vulnerable things into her arms in an act of defiant affection.

She is her aging mother's caregiver, which also entails assembling and protecting the story of her mother as well as the joy and hurt that's been passed down to her as a daughter. "Baptism" reckons with what that intense intimacy of caregiving might take from her and her brother in the process, while "Mockingbird" serves as a gorgeous mythology to her mother: her allure, her charisma, the spirits and fears she instilled in her children, her pain, her "swollen Bible on the bathtub" and the memories of her existence that will ultimately live on through her daughter: "My mother, spitfire, African dancer, executive director..." She explores her own resistances to becoming a mother, imagining her inability to protect her Black children from a world that makes them into targets. She imagines herself with a hypothetical Black son, overcome with the anxiety for his safety in stark contrast to her desire to give him the love and nourishment he deserves.

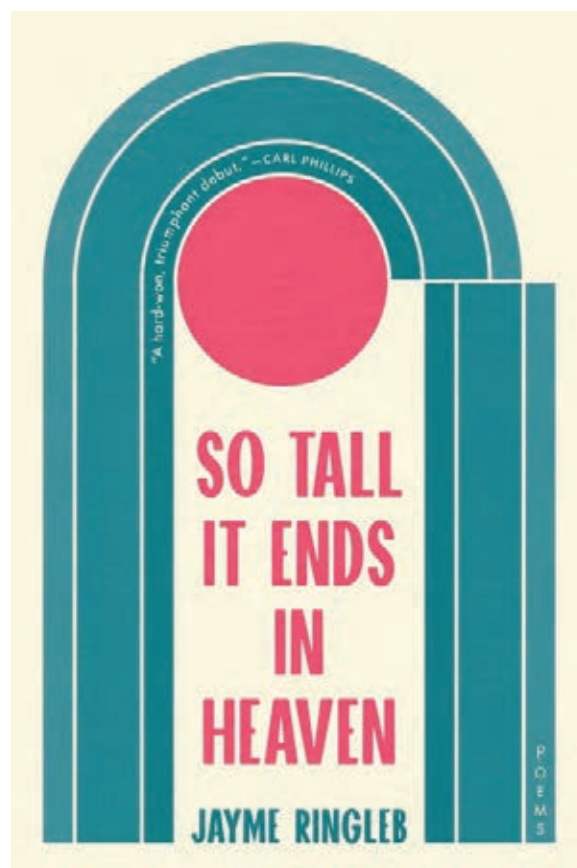
Her decision to not have children is scrutinized, cast as a lack instead of a choice. She marks the ways she is made a target by virtue of her Blackness, by virtue of having a uterus. "An Abortion Ban" invokes the confounding barrage of legal and systemic threat thrust upon women, language circling in on itself in a constricting web: "The uterus is a cave, / is an incubator, is a vault, // is a self-destructing bomb, / is a thoroughfare." Self-actualization, however, imbued with power and hope, offers a language of resistance. If "blessings and curses are sisters", as she says elsewhere, her impulses to take care of those she holds dearly allows her to manifest that same gesture of monumental strength from within herself: "I remember, now, / how much light I can create."

So Tall It Ends in Heaven

Jayne Ringleb

(*Tin House*, 2022)

Jayne Ringleb's debut collection traces the ways love and attachment make us intensely vulnerable to versions of ourselves which inevitably can't last: "Forgive me / if the self is best // when falling out of love / with the



self." The queer speaker, Southern by way of landscapes from Florida to South Carolina, recalls his former lover's departure, piece by piece, as a foreseeable process and no less valuable for it as their intimacy deepens with an ability to both give in to and let go of one another. The speaker holds on tenderly to what's irrevocably lost, including the dream of a father willing to accept his son as a gay man. He wonders about the version of himself that his father might love—the God-fearing one with a wife and a deep well within himself to swallow pain down into and without remorse. The speaker quietly allows himself to wonder what it might mean to simply give away parts of himself in order to slip into the manageable cover of being whatever others want of him—brief moments rendered like the memories of a version of himself that never was and never could've been.

Love and loss are bound up in the same imagination. The speaker embraces the flaws of his lover giving himself license to do the same. Strays (lovers, friends, cats) weave in and out like ghosts; sometimes, as is the case of a mystic-leaning acquittance, to offer composure amidst heartbreak, and sometimes embodying the indifference of the world's pull. Throughout the collection, deep longing

for answers ultimately (inevitably) lead to startling images of give and take: “unaccountable self-losses and -gains, the whitecaps’ / snowy logic seeming nothing more than the sea / fleeing the sea, and then the sea giving the sea back/to itself. Dying, I hope, is something like that.” We’re always being made and remade in the image of what we long for.

The speaker’s quest for acceptance from his father takes him all the way from South Carolina to Europe where he tracks his father down in Italy. In a vividly-rendered sequence, the speaker barter for his absent father’s attention propelled only by a faith in following a rejection to its heartbreaking conclusion: “Above us, a cloud swallows the mountain. My father / moves on, and around him the cloud splits, my father a word in the / mouth, and then the cloud closes back on itself, and I follow him.” If love is a deep desire to get something right without knowing quite how, grief is what allows the speaker to keep trying.



The Air in the Air Behind It

Brandon Rushton

(Tupelo Press, 2022)

Brandon Rushton’s *The Air in the Air Behind It* hunts down the modern dread caught between big, zoomed out Earth-level views of humanity and the face-to-face carrying on of life’s daily tedium and obligation. Poems in the collection are certainly about both of those spheres—

the micro and macro imagination of this historical present of American experience—but even more, calibrated to capture the feel of that force acting upon us at all times: “Something massive moves in, melts, and rapidly meanders out.” We’re at once noting the neighbor-dentist pulling into the wrong driveway across the street simultaneous to our anxiety of global climate catastrophe.

The book’s opening line is its own sly, implicit proposition: “In an age of emergency, experiments are always the first things to be abandoned.” What do we even have the capacity to hold on to when our collective force keeps our world (and what to do about it) hidden from us in plain sight? “Dismissed from some other duty / the drawbridge attendant questions / the stability of days. As in how long / until what we’ve been holding on to / finally gives way.” Poems in the collection seem to suggest we’re holding on to something broken because we simply can’t let go. Our current state of exception collects us into two worlds collapsed in on one another: one always-already in crisis (the polar caps are melting, our food and water are increasingly contaminated, even the air we breathe is cause for healthy concern: “I grow considerably // skeptical of the automation / conditioning my air...”); while at the same time, inhabiting the other existence has us dutifully tending to the groceries, passively glued to screens, and catching ourselves staring off into space or just beyond the bus pulling up to the street, blanking just long enough to miss it. There’s an anxiety about the weight of it all: “...We have the right / to be alarmed... We are all constantly pursuing // a feeling until the feeling we had once / was felt again...”

Seeing Rushton capture these shifty, elusive feelings and snapshots with the right poetic timing to reconcile everything is thrilling. Poems here are so smartly guided by meticulous attention to metrical detail. Lines build and build at a forward-rushing clip, rarely stopping to settle in to take a breath. The syntax of the standard sentence holds everything together like scaffolding while at the same time we’re presented with beautifully ornate, dense interwoven thickets of images frequently overlaid on top of one another—one image’s end might by the way forward into the next. The overall effect is one of startling momentum, but also understated humanness particular to our moment: “if you don’t mind I’d like to rest // a moment though, there’s no time / like the present feels a lot like a / misrepresentation of my precious absence.” Recognizing our creeping desire to take a step back may be the only way to leave ourselves with something real to hold on to.

JASPER GALLERIES

Grow to 6-plus Locations

By Christina Xan

In October 2018, the Jasper Project started a new monthly gallery in their space at Tapp’s Art Center—the Tiny Gallery. They didn’t know that in fewer than five years, this effort would bloom into a full-blown gallery series with six locations across the city.

Jasper Galleries may have six locations, but the mission remains the same. Jasper Galleries’ aim is to promote Midlands-based artists and their work, representing a vast range of mediums, styles, themes, and price points. Jasper Galleries seeks to reach all patrons from beginning collectors to longtime art lovers by collaborating not just with a variety of artists but with various locations. The Jasper Galleries currently curates art in five places around the city physically—the Meridian Building, Harbison Theatre, Motor Supply Co., SoundBites Eatery, the Koger Center—and one place virtually—Tiny Gallery.

Tiny Gallery

As stated previously, Tiny Gallery started in 2018 with the mission of allowing artists an opportunity to show a selection of their smaller pieces of art offered at affordable price points attractive to beginning collectors and arts patrons with smaller budgets. All pieces are 15” x 15” or smaller and under \$200.

When Tapp’s closed in 2019, Tiny Gallery began looking for a new space, but when COVID-19 hit in 2020, Jasper made the decision to move the gallery online, providing a haven for people to seek out art. Even now, due to its success and the unique ability to view art 24/7, Tiny Gallery continues as a fully virtual gallery and shows one artist every month and a collaboration with Midlands Clay Arts Society offering handcrafted holiday ornaments in December.



Located on Jasper’s virtual gallery site, Tiny Gallery’s featured artists have included Ginny Merett, K. Wayne Thornley, Bohumila Augustinova and Keith Tolen.

The Meridian Building

In early 2019, Jasper was approached by the Meridian about displaying work in their building. Board member Bert Easter took point on this project, and today the gallery at the Meridian Building features art in block-length window displays on Washington and Sumter Streets so patrons can peruse local art while walking downtown.

Located downtown at 1320 Main Street, Meridian’s featured artists have included Virginia Scotchie, Susan Lenz, Nikolai Oskolkov, and Scotty Peek.

Harbison Theatre

Also in 2019, Kristin Cobb, Executive Director at Harbison Theatre and Jasper Project Vice President, approached the board with the idea of showing art in the lobby of the theatre. The theatre, which is part of Midlands Technical College, brings an array of national talent to its intimate performing arts space.

The gallery at Harbison works in tandem with this talent by bringing in local work. This gives the performance artists and patrons the chance to view visual art before and after shows and provides Irmo residents access to Midlands-area art. Solo shows go up every 2 – 3 months, and opening receptions are held for each artist in correspondence with show premieres. Art can be accessed during Harbison’s business hours and on performance days.

Located in Irmo at 7300 College Street, Harbison’s featured artists have included Steven White, David Yaghjian, Michael Krajewski, and Lori Isom.



Motor Supply Co. Bistro

Later in 2019, Eddie Wales, owner of Motor Supply Co. Bistro, approached Jasper about showing art on the walls of the restaurant. Motor Supply serves New World cuisine and artisan cocktails with nearly everything made in-house, all within an 1840s building that originally served as a warehouse for motor parts—the original neon sign still hangs outside.

The gallery at Motor Supply, curated by Jasper board member Laura Garner Hine, adds character to an already lively space, allowing Columbia patrons to enjoy local art with local food and drink. The artists who show at Motor Supply have a solo show that is up for three months. Art within the building can be accessed during the restaurant’s normal business hours.

Located in the Vista at 920 Gervais Street, Motor Supply’s featured artists have included Candace Thibeault, Michael McGuirt, David Michael Dwyer, and Shelby LeBlanc.

Sound Bites Eatery

In 2022, Terri McLaughlin approached Jasper about hanging art in the new restaurant she was running with friend and chef Mai Turner. Sound Bites uses their space to offer not just fresh food to the Main Street area but fresh events like music performances and jam sessions.

The gallery at Sound Bites joins in on the vibrant character here by showing local art to patrons and taking part in Main Street's First Thursday festivities. Shows go up monthly with an Opening Reception on the First Thursday of each month, and art can be accessed during Sound Bites' operating hours.

Located downtown at 1425 Sumter Street, Sound Bites' featured artists have included Gina Langston Brewer, Lucas Sams, Marius Valdes, and Alex Ruskell.



Koger Center

The gallery at the Koger Center is the most recent addition to Jasper Galleries with the first show having taken place in January 2023. Koger Center Marketing and Administrative Assistant (and Jasper Secretary) Emily Moffitt brought the idea both to Jasper and to Nate Terracio and Chip Wade at Koger with the hopes of further expanding the art present at the location.

The Koger Center is a performing arts venue that brings a plethora of national talent to the city, and this newest art location, named the Pocket Gallery, both adds a chance for Columbia patrons to view local artists while attending performances and initiates Koger and Jasper's participation in the Vista's Third Thursday. Solo shows go up monthly and open on the Third Thursday of each month. They can be accessed during Koger Center's business hours and on performance days. (Read Emily Moffitt's article on Koger Center Art on page 19.)

Located at 1051 Greene Street, the Koger Center's featured artists have included or will include Thomas Crouch, Lindsay R. Wiggins, Quincy Pugh, and Lauren Chapman.



Jasper Galleries occasionally shows work at additional locations such as the Hallway Gallery at 701 Whaley in collaboration with Lee Ann Kornegay and Coal Powered Filmworks in tandem with Vista events like Vista Lights. Jasper Galleries plans to continue to expand and is open to requests for showing work in new and exciting places.



LEE RENDEZVOUS
ALEXANDER McQUEEN **ANN RAY**

October 7, 2023 – January 21, 2024

Haute Couture Sponsor: Generous anonymous support to celebrate the extraordinary life of Joe Blanchard

Platinum Sponsor: Melissa W. Blanchard Gold Sponsors: Joyce and George Hill

Organized and produced by Barrett Barrera Projects

the Columbia
Museum of **ART**

Alexander McQueen, Four-panel minidress, crystal kaleidoscopic print blazer, and multicolor silk moth print kaleidoscope dress. *Natural Dis-tinction, Un-natural Selection*, Spring/Summer 2009 and *Plato's Atlantis*, Spring/Summer 2010 Photo Barrett Barrera Projects. Courtesy of Barrett Barrera Projects & RKL Consulting