

VONA Achievements

Many of our new fam may now be feeling the VONA love but also a little bit weary. That's the VONA withdrawal after two phenomenal weeks in our new home at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. We welcomed over 150 writers from around the nation and the world into the VONA tribe. Each of them brought their gifts to continue to grow their work and our community. (The withdrawal can be assuaged by looking out for local VONA writer's meetups in your locales. If there isn't one, start your own!)

- We also welcomed new faculty member **Beth Minh Nguyen** who taught memoir and **Danez Smith**, a VONA alum, for poetry. We are richer for your presence and commitment.
- Philly embraced our arrival with an [interview](#) with our executive director, **Diem Jones**, on the local CBS radio affiliate. We are thrilled to be part of the city's bubbling literary landscape.
- Diem's potent joy over our recent workshop can be felt in his new piece on Medium, [Celebration of...](#)

Awards and Acceptances

- Put your hands together for **Jennifer Baker** who has been racking up the writing grant winnings: 2017 New York State Council on the Arts/New York Foundation for the Arts for nonfiction and another from Queens Council on the Arts. The grants will fund her work on an essay collection about her family's migration to New York.
- We tell you all the time that they're out there and here's proof. Fully Funded MFA! **Agatha Roa** is on her way to one having been awarded the 2017 Bernice Kert Green Fellowship in creative writing. Agatha will be attending the University of North Carolina. She will also be joining the editorial staff at [Ecotone](#).
- **Nia Dickens** was [accepted](#) into the next class of Hugo House's emerging writer's program, "Made at the Hugo House" in Seattle. She'll be continuing to craft her short story collection about the grandchildren of a North Carolina tobacco farmer in the wake of 9/11.
- **Alexis Pauline Gumbs** will be featured at this year's [Hobart Book Village Festival of Women Writers](#) along with VONA fam [Tayari A. Jones](#), [Cheryl Boyce-Taylor](#) and [Kamilah Aisha Moon](#), [Kathy Engel](#) and more! Alexis was also [interviewed](#) for their site. Finally,

earlier this year she spoke at the Activist Poetics Symposium on her forthcoming book, *M Archive*. You can check it out [here](#).

- *Hello and Goodbye*, **Donna Misolta**'s short story [collection](#), is piling up the winnings. The book was awarded an Independent Publishers award for best regional fiction – West Pacific and is also a finalist for an International Latino Book Award. Additionally, she's listed as a finalist on *Seattle Weekly*'s Reader's Poll for Best Author.
- **Wilona Sloan** wrote to tell me that she's "super excited" to have been accepted into the Winter Tangerine Workshop - Sing That Like Dovesong.
- Regional workshop alum **Debra Stone** was accepted to the Anderson Artist Residency in Red Wing, MN.
- The Fine Arts Work Center awarded **Nadia Ahmad** a general tuition scholarship to attend in June! She studied with poet and fiction writer Jennifer Tseng at the acclaimed institute. In addition, two of Nadia's poems were published in issue 10 of [Newtown Literary](#), a journal that featuring the work of writers from Queens, NY. Ever busy, in mid-July, she was a featured reader at the Ekphrastic Tour of Socrates Sculpture Park
- "Ricochet." an essay by **Ruby Hansen Murray** won the 2017 Montana Creative Writing Prize.
- Cuba welcomed VONA poet **Nia Mendy** in late June. Awarded funding through the New Orleans Arts Council, **Nia** did a residency in Santiago de Cuba. She was able to take part in the festival held there, performing "Birth in the Compound" a piece about her grandmother.
- Four-time VONA alum **Grace Sobrenome** was selected by author Alexander Chee for mentorship at renowned writing retreat, Kundiman. She will be working with Chee as Kundiman's prose fellow.
- The 2015 popular fiction alums have been crushing it! Both **Rashda Khan** and **Sasha Roxanna** have won funding to further their work. Rashda, a news reporter, won a Gannett Scholarship on which she attended the 2017 Investigative Reporters and Editor's conference. Sasha was recently [awarded](#) an Emerging Writer Fellowship from Aspen Summer Words
- **Jennifer Zeynab Maccani** is doing writing big: she was nominated for and awarded an artists' residency at the Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, CA. Her debut novel, [The Map of Salt and Stars](#) is due out from Touchstone spring 2018. Plus her insightful craft essay, is up at *Bird's Thumb*. The piece "[Small Acts of Creation](#)" explores the use of short stories to ignite work on novels and life changes.

Published Poems, Prose and Other Perfection

- The Pop Fiction '15 crushing continues:
 - **Rebecca Parish**'s essay on Native American representation in speculative fiction can be found in the anthology *Invisible 3*. Look out for her short story in the August issue of *Apex* magazine.
 - **Devi Laskar**'s 2018 is already starting off spectacularly. Her second chapbook of poetry, *Anastasia Maps* (Finishing Line Press) will be released in January. Plus, her short story "Stalks" is set to be published in February issue of *Crab Orchard Review*.
 - **Irette Patterson**'s story "Legacy" is in *People of Color Take Over Fantastic Stories of the Imagination*. You can find a second piece, "Respectable" in the summer issue of *Shooter* literary magazine.

- Team Member **Mona Washington** has been busy. She's blogging and writing site specific plays for the Philadelphia Museum of Art's first public art project, "[Philadelphia Assembled](#)". The project aims to tell the story of building Philly communities by collecting oral histories and personal narratives.

- This fall look for the release of *like a solid to a shadow*. The book is **Janice Lobo Sapiago**'s second poetry collection and will be released by Timeless Infinite Light.

- Last month I noted faculty member **M. Evelina Galang**'s response to the controversial *Atlantic* essay "[My Family's Slave](#)". **Melissa R. Sipin** has added her voice to the dialogue. Her wrenching piece, "[Filipineza](#)" Doesn't Mean "[Servant: Notes of Witness from an Immigrant Daughter](#)" was published in *Salon*

- **Noel Marie Falcis**' lyric poem "[Walang Hiya; Or Utterly Shameless](#)" was included in the latest issue of *Kartika Review*.

- *What We Lose*, the debut novel by alum **Zinzi Clemmons** is on fire! Just released by Viking, it's received high praise from multiple press outlets. Her recent interview in *Vogue* is actually entitled "[Zenzi Clemmons Has Written the Debut Novel of The Year.](#)" 'Nuf said.

- Speaking of *Vogue*, it's Teen iteration just had the good sense to publish the ever-prolific **Bani Amor**. Bani, always on a mission to represent travel from a POC POV, wrote a passionate op-ed about activism in one of her home countries, [What Ecuador's Feminist History Can Teach Us All](#).

- Looking for somewhere to send your kickass essays? **Christine Hyung-Oak Lee** is the new features editor at [The Rumpus](#) and she's looking for you! She says there's a definite dearth of POC writing and wants your work to help her change that.
- Online lit mag *Entropy* chose **José Alfredo Menjivar**'s piece on food and memory, "[Abuelita Knowledge](#)," for this month's feature. Jose worked on the piece in VONA staffer **Vanessa Martir**'s New York workshop, Writing Our Lives. Love it when the family comes together.
- Speaking of Vanessa, **Connie Pertuz-Meza** is among the many taking the VONA staffer's essay-a-week challenge. "[A Writer's Prayer](#)," her 24th essay, is a courageous and lovely dedication to VONA.
- VONA writers are taking the stage. **Doreen Oliver** is headed Off-Broadway! *Everything Is Fine Until It's Not*, her one-woman show about parenting an autistic son and managing life will have its second run in September as part of the United Solo Festival. The piece premiered at the Fringe Festival last year where it sold out! United Solo is the country's largest series for one person works. [Get tickets!](#)
- After successful productions around the Bay Area, **Irma Herrera's** solo show, [Why Would I Mispronounce My Own Name?](#) debuted in her hometown of San Antonio in late July.
- Poetry journal, *Vinyl*, picked up "[Black girl sips tea with Nina Simone](#)," a new poem by 2017 alum **Brittany Rogers**.
- In honor of Independence Day, *The Washington Post* published **Arvin Temkar's** nuanced "[Fellow Liberals Hate Lee Greenwood's 'God Bless the USA' I Love It](#)"
- *Apogee*, always a believer in VONA writers thanks to board member **David Mura**, included **Tayvonne Carson's** creative nonfiction work, "naked in twelve steps", in their [latest issue](#).
- "[Oblivion](#)," **Lark Omura's** poem about a day trip to the beach, can be found in the current issue of *Canary*
- **Kaiaia Alderson-Tyson** has taken getting her work out into her own hands. She's self-published two, one-page comics as posters, "Mountaintop" and "Rise, Geek Girl, Rise." Another of her one-page comics was included in *The International Girl Gang Encyclopedia* earlier this year. The book was featured in the Angouleme International Comics Festival in France

- **Sarah Ladipo Manyika** co-interviewed literary royalty, Ms. Toni Morrison, for [Granta](#).
- Latinx lit journal *Label Me Latina/o*, picked up novel [excerpts](#) from two of our writers: **Ivelisse Rodriguez's** *The Last Salsa Singer* and **Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa's** *A Woman of Endurance*. There are also two essays about Dahlma's 2009 novel, *Daughters of the Stone* (Thomas Dunne Books).
- Political literature site *Vox Populi* reprinted **Angele Ellis'** poems "[Federal Building](#)" and "[On Hearing That FBI Anti-Terrorism Agents Spied on the Thomas Merton Center](#)." The pieces are from her 2008 book *Arab On Radar* (Six Gallery).
- While fiction writer **Aum Asi** was doing the work in Evelina Galang's fiction workshop this June, her short story, [Rabbit](#), was published in *Litro Online*.
- Be sure to check out the upcoming issue of *KCET* for a new essay by memoir 2010 alum, **Michelle Wallace**. The piece, "Public Art with a Social Impact: A Corridor of Social of Art in Mexico City's Guerrero Neighborhood", will be out soon.

Readings

- VONA poet **JP Howard's** monthly Women Writers in Bloom Poetry Salon will be featuring fellow VONA poet, **Anastacia-Reneé** on Saturday Sept 30th in New York. The gathering will celebrate the publication of her three new books all forthcoming in 2017! Also, the Black Lesbian Literary Collective Review published an excerpt of an [interview](#) with our Ms. JP. The full interview will be in the upcoming issue of lit journal *Serendipity*.
- On the opposite coast, **Lorenz Mazon Dumuk** was a featured poet at an event hosted by the Poetry Center highlighting San Jose's poetry slam teams.
- In late June, a whole crew of VONA folks read at the Queer & Trans Showcase: When the Chant Comes. **Kay Ulanday Barrett**, **Angela Penaredondo** and **Alan Pelaez** brought the fierce at the event held at New York's Asian American Writer's Workshop.
- The Hong Kong International Literary Festival gave a whole lot of love to **Stephanie Han** this July. Her book [Swimming in Hong Kong](#) made its recent debut in that country after being released in the U.S. in January. While there she was interviewed by online mag *Still/Loud*, local news site *Lantau news*, the *South China Morning Post* and local radio station RTHK-3. You can find the interviews on her [site](#).

Faculty Doings

- In honor of the centennial of Gwendolyn Brooks, **Patricia Smith** was the guest blogger for the Poetry Foundation's site. A native Chicagoan like Brooks, Patricia's "[Just as Bronze](#)" is a touching tribute to their shared neighborhood and its people.
- Here's a brief quiz. What poet—not singer, dancer or standup—could hold her own as the opening act for the Grammy winning, extra-phenomenal Jill Scott's national tour and bring nearly 3,000 folks in Brooklyn to cheering on their feet? Only our volcanic **Staceyann Chin**! She's on [tour](#) with Scott across the country. Be sure to catch both of them!
- VONA love spreads! VONA alum, **Patricia Engel** published **M. Evelina Galang**'s story, "[America, Still Beautiful](#)" in *Miami Rail*. Evelina's newest book and labor of love, [Lola's House](#) will be out in September.
- Tiny kidlets will soon get their introduction to the vast and wonderful gifts of VONA co-founder **Junot Diaz**. *Islandborn*, his first book for youngins is now available for [preorder](#) from Dial Books. Though the story about a Dominican girl's imaginings of the Island won't be out until 2018, it's already creating delight with pieces in the *New York Times* and *Buzzfeed*. ¡Excelente!
- **Faith Adiele** gave a shout out to VONA in her [interview](#) for travel journal *On She Goes*.
- San Diego Comic Con welcomed **Marjorie Liu**! She made a stop there—with a broken foot!-- as part of her tour for the release of [Monstress v.2](#), the second compendium in her graphic fantasy series, released in mid-July by Image Comics.
- It's almost here! *Atlanta Noir*, a new anthology edited and with an introduction by **Tayari Jones** and featuring a story by **Tananarive Due** will finally be released on August 1st. If you want more of these VONA phenoms, **Field Trip** by Tananarive can be found in the recently published, *Dark Cities*. Both she and her husband, Steven Barnes were featured in a recent [NPR interview](#) about spec fiction deity, Octavia Butler.

Though it won't be out until February, you can enter now to win a copy of Tayari's upcoming novel, [An American Marriage](#). The story about a young couple who face a life-altering injustice, is among others available to winners of [Algonquin Books'](#) All Summer Long Sweepstakes. Students at UNLV will be blessed with her literary wisdom as she'll

be a writer-in-residence this academic year. Tayari was named one of three [Black Mountain Institute Bennet Fellows](#) selected to enrich the culture of the university.

Nuggets of Uncategorizable Greatness

- Season two of the transcendent [Queen Sugar](#) began in June. The series, on the Own Network, is based on the novel of the same name by VONA alum **Natalie Baszile**.
- VONA writers are sharing their stories any way they can! *Food 4 Thot*, a podcast cohosted by VONA alum **Dennis Norris**, was [featured](#) in online lifestyle journal, Sweet.

And new to the fam, **Yodassa Williams'** [The Black Girl Magic Files](#) is a story telling podcast that can be found on Soundcloud.