

Yaddo



FALL NEWS 2015



The Leap: Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath and a Mesmerizing Season

Perhaps no two figures in twentieth-century Anglo-American poetry have given rise to more partisanship than Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath.

It's a commonplace that interest in the personal — their marriage, his philandering, their separation, her suicide — has clouded interest in the purely literary. Jonathan Bate's new and well-received biography, *Ted Hughes: An Unauthorized Life*, takes the experiences of Hughes's life and shows how he fashioned them into his robust, earthy poetry. (Hughes was a compatible subject for Bate, an Oxford don and Shakespeare scholar — during national service at a tiny RAF outpost in Yorkshire, Hughes passed the time memorizing Shakespeare's plays.)

The excerpt here details Hughes's and Plath's time at Yaddo in the autumn of 1959, representing it as the fulcrum of Plath's development as a poet. When

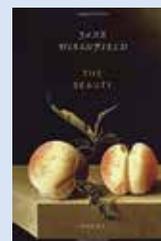
the young couple arrived at Yaddo (Plath had been recommended by Alfred Kazin as "the best writer at Smith, and a very remarkable girl in every way") it was the first time in three years of marriage that they'd had separate, private workspaces. Hughes worked on his second book of poetry, *Lupercal*, and an oratorio based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead, while Plath dug in on a large number of new poems that were ultimately collected in her first book, *The Colossus and Other Poems*. Plath and Hughes, who were practicing meditation daily and interested in hypnotism, were part of a lively group that included Malcolm Cowley, Ned Rorem, and May Swenson. Bate writes: "Very few Plath poems written before Yaddo stick in the mind; almost all the hundred or so that Sylvia wrote thereafter sear themselves into the consciousness of the attentive reader. Years earlier,

ABOVE: Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath in Concord, Massachusetts, December 1959. Photo by Marcia Brown Stern. Courtesy of Smith College. **AT LEFT** and on mailing panel: Photo by Meredith Maran.

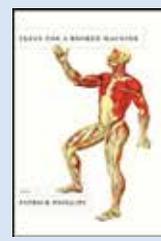
POET'S CORNER



It is rare for arts awards to be announced without seeing the name of a Yaddo artist — or two. This year, however, four Yaddo poets were longlisted for the National Book Award for Poetry:



Marilyn Hacker
A Stranger's Mirror: New and Selected Poems, 1994-2014 (W.W. Norton & Company)



Jane Hirshfield
The Beauty (Knopf)



Patrick Phillips
Elegy for a Broken Machine (Knopf)

Lawrence Raab
Mistaking Each Other for Ghosts (Tupelo Press)

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL!

Plath had dreamed of gathering forces into a tight tense ball for the artistic leap. At Yaddo, she made that leap." (Excerpt follows.)

Yaddo is an artists' community located on a 400-acre estate in Saratoga Springs. It was founded in 1900 by a wealthy financier called Spencer Trask and his wife, Katrina, who wrote poetry herself. Left without immediate heirs by the deaths of their

continues on page 4



Blaze of Color | A Magnificent Stained Glass Window Restored

At the time the Yaddo Mansion was completed in 1893, stained glass was the height of fashion. It represented craftsmanship, spirituality, and uniqueness – qualities that mass production threatened to make obsolete. Perhaps no one was more sensitive to the costs of industrial growth than the agents of change themselves. Like other people of their time with industrial and stock market fortunes, Spencer and Katrina Trask were patrons of the revival of Gothic and English Renaissance styles and commissioned numerous stained glass windows for their Saratoga Springs and Tuxedo residences. In subject matter, they range from simple forms drawn from nature, such as the airy pink roses in Katrina's bedroom, to more complex narrative scenes. The window in the foyer of the Mansion depicts a romanticized encounter between indigenous Americans and settlers on the land that would become Yaddo.

Though it had undergone conservation in the 1980s, a recent assessment determined that the central panel of the window was in critical need of attention. In October 2014, it was removed and delivered to Venturella

Art and *The Arrival of the Halve Maen, 1609* (1908), which decorates the Reading Room of the New-York Historical Society.

Over the next ten months, principal restorer Tom Venturella and his colleague



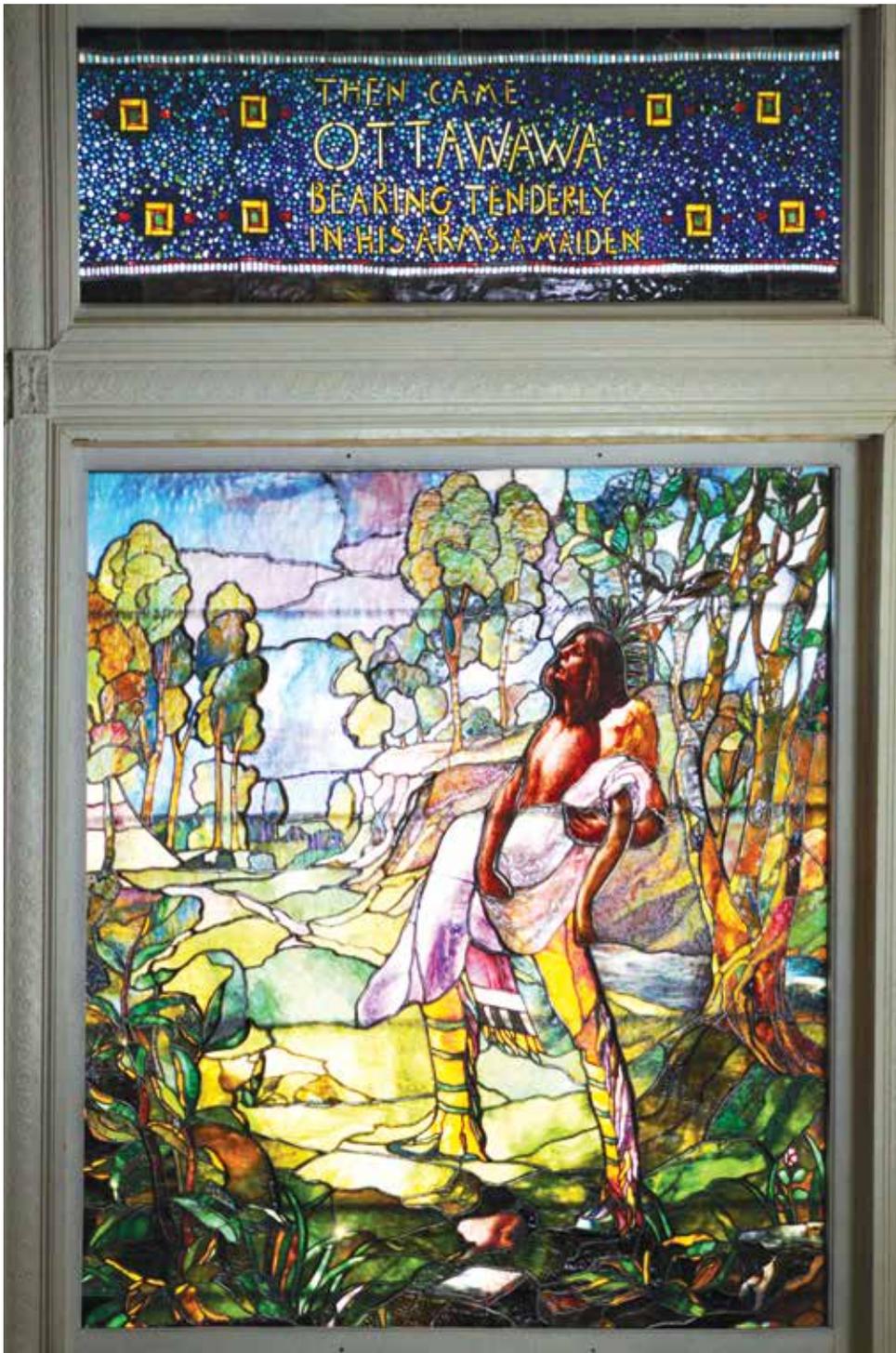
Studio in New York, whose previous commissions include works in the Tiffany collection of the Morse Museum of American

Jim Murphy cleaned each of the window's 1300 individual pieces of glass. Once every piece had been treated, it was fitted into a

Tiffany pattern made of new lead. While most windows of this size are comprised of small panels connected by a lap joint, ours is a single panel, and the restoration team had to build a wooden frame in order to flip it. (Tom Venturella said it “wanted to fold like a large piece of cloth” and they “had to move like ballet dancers” to hold it steady.) It weighs approximately 325 pounds. The window was reinstalled on August 28.

Two days later, around fifty friends of Yaddo, including elected officials, gathered to

celebrate. Guest speaker Jennifer Anderson, associate professor of history at SUNY Stony Brook, spoke of the window as a historical artifact, observing that that the 1890s marked the end of armed conflict between Native Americans and settlers that there was a cultural trend toward recasting the past in a benevolent light. The medium itself lends itself to that use: as she noted, the purpose



of stained glass, with its ecclesiastical associations, is “to elevate, to inspire.” She finished by likening the window’s glass fragments to pieces of a shared American identity.

Following her remarks, New York State Senator Kathy Marchione, whose help was instrumental in securing for Yaddo a combined \$500,000 in state funding to begin restoration of the Mansion, and who called Yaddo a “gem of the community,” introduced Congressman Paul Tonko. The congressman said that as a “member of the Congressional Arts Caucus and the National Heritage Areas Caucus, [he] look[s] forward to supporting Yaddo and all it gives back to the Capital Region each and every day.” The two raised their glasses and led everyone in a toast to a job well done.

The restoration of the window is just the first step in what will be a multiyear undertaking to preserve the house for the benefit of the more than two hundred artists who come to Yaddo each year to work. It is the acknowledged heart of the artist retreat, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2013 in recognition of its contribution to American culture, and an iconic sight for the fifty thousand annual visitors to the Yaddo Gardens.

OPPOSITE PAGE Top: Once cleaned, the fragments were fixed in place with pins until the glazing process – the final step – began. Left: Each piece of glass was assigned a number corresponding to a place in the lead network. Note the coins for scale. Photos by Peter Peregrine.

THIS PAGE Top: Congressman Paul Tonko (center) talks with restorers Jim Murphy (at far left) and Tom Venturella and State Senator Kathy Marchione. Left: The window is a testament to the superb craftsmanship of its original makers and restorers. Photos by Lynn Farenell.

Yaddo is grateful to American Express, Nana Lampton, and the Charles R. Wood Foundation for their generous support of this project.

THE LEAP *continued from front cover*

four young children, the Trasks decided to bequeath their palatial home to future generations of writers, composers, painters and other creative artists. Katrina had a vision of generations of talented men and women yet unborn walking the lawns of Yaddo, 'creating, creating, creating'. The idea was to nurture the creative process by providing an opportunity for artists to work without interruption in peaceful, green surroundings. The great American short-story writer John Cheever would write that the 'forty or so acres on which the principal buildings of

in the woods – the perfect place for him. 'A regular little house to himself', Sylvia wrote to her mother, 'all glassed in and surrounded by pines, with a wood stove for the winter, a cot, and huge desk'. A writing hut away from the main house would be his salvation at Court Green in later years. The chance to live together but work apart was exactly what they needed. Meals were taken care of and the food was very good, a welcome change from the campground cookery of the summer. Breakfast was available from eight till nine, lunchboxes were then collected and taken to each resident's studio, and in the evening they



West House, the second-largest house for artists on the estate, where Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes lived and worked in 1959.

Yaddo stand have seen more distinguished activity in the arts than any other piece of ground in the English-speaking community and perhaps the world'.

When Ted and Sylvia arrived just after Labor Day, the main house had been closed for winter. They were given spacious rooms in the clapperboard West House, among the trees. Each of them had a separate 'studio', Sylvia's on the top floor of the house and Ted's out

all gathered for dinner. Being a quiet season, there were only a dozen artists in residence, including painters, an interesting composer and a couple of other poets whose names were not familiar to them.

One of the painters, Howard Rogovin, did portraits of both Sylvia and Ted. For Sylvia, he set up his easel in the old greenhouse. To the sound of 'rain in the conifers', he painted Sylvia lifted out of herself 'In a flaming of oils', her 'lips exact'. But he also seemed to catch a shadow on her shoulder, a dark marauding 'doppelganger'. At one point, a graceful snake slid across the dusty floor of the hot greenhouse. Both this portrait and the one of Ted, which was said to be less successful, are lost.

The composer was Chou Wen-chung, a United States immigrant from Shandong in China. A protégé of the radical experimentalist Edgar Varèse, he sought to integrate Eastern and Western classical (and modernist) musical traditions. They struck up a friendship and Ted began work on a libretto for him, for an oratorio based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead. The original title, *Bardo Thödol*, literally means 'Liberation through Hearing during

the Intermediate State'. These 'intermediate states' included the dream state, the moment of death in which the clear light of reality is experienced, and the 'bardo of rebirth', which involved hallucinatory images of men and women erotically entwined. The project was never finished, but it took Ted into territory that he would make his own in almost all his later mythic works.

His main project at Yaddo was his play (now lost, save for a few fragments), 'The House of Taurus'. Sylvia described it in a letter home written in early October: 'a symbolic drama based on the Euripides play *The Bacchae*, only set in a modern industrial community under a paternalistic ruler'. She hoped that it would at least get a staged reading, but explained that she had not yet typed it up.

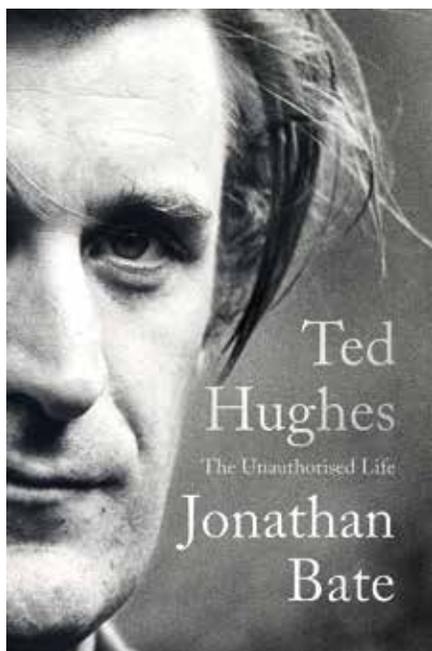
During the weeks at Yaddo Ted also revised one or two of the poems in his forthcoming 'Lupercalia' collection, but for poetic development it was more of a breakthrough moment for Sylvia. Before Yaddo, her verse had been highly accomplished but somehow brittle. A self-description in a journal entry of late 1955 was harsh but apt: 'Roget's trollop, parading words and tossing off bravado for an audience' (*Roget's Thesaurus* was the vade mecum of writers looking for unusual words for ordinary things). Very few Plath poems written before Yaddo stick in the mind; almost all the hundred or so that Sylvia wrote thereafter sear themselves into the consciousness of the attentive reader. Years earlier, Plath had dreamed of gathering forces into a tight tense ball for the artistic leap. At Yaddo, she made that leap.

On 10 October 1959, she wrote in her journal: 'Feel oddly barren. My sickness is when words draw in their horns and the physical world refuses to be ordered, recreated, arranged and selected. When will I break into a new line of poetry? Feel trite.' It was certainly odd to feel barren when she was at last pregnant. Then on the 13th: 'Very depressed today. Unable to write a thing. Menacing gods. I feel outcast on a cold star.' Ted told her to 'get desperate'. On the night of the 21st, she felt 'animal solaces' as she lay with him, warm in bed. The next day, walking in the woods in the frosty morning light, she found the 'Ambitious seeds of a long poem made up of separate sections: Poem on her Birthday. To be a dwelling on madhouse, nature. The superb identity, selfhood of things.

To be honest with what I know and have known. To be true to my own weirdnesses! Madhouse, nature, identity, self, weirdness: in 'Poem for a Birthday,' Sylvia began for the first time to write poetry overtly about her suicide attempt, mental breakdown and electro-convulsive therapy, albeit refracted through a symbolic narrative of descent and rebirth.

Within a fortnight the sequence was 'miraculously' written. The title came from the fact that her birthday fell halfway through the process of composition. What was it that released the flow? The example of Lowell confronting his nervous breakdown in *Life Studies* was crucial. Ted, who was convinced that this was indeed the turning point in her poetic career, pointed to the influence of the poetry of Theodore Roethke, which she read in the Yaddo library (where she also renewed her acquaintance with the wonderfully confident and supple poetry of Elizabeth Bishop). Conversations with Ted about the death and rebirth structure of *Bardo Thödol* would also have played a part. But her journal offers other clues. It reveals that she was 'electrified' by the consonance between the imagery she was developing and the language of Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*, another book in the well-stocked Yaddo library. And a couple of days earlier, her creativity released by some breathing exercises that Ted taught her, she had written two poems that pleased her, one to 'Nicholas,' the name they had chosen for their child if it proved to be a boy, and the other on 'the old father-worship subject.' The father who had died when she was eight and the unborn child in her womb. She was on a cusp, about eighteen weeks pregnant. Did the baby quicken and give its first kick at this time? Before her stood tomorrow.

They returned to Wellesley just before Thanksgiving. Sylvia was now noticeably pregnant. Aurelia later remembered Ted working away in the upstairs bedroom while Sylvia 'sorted and packed the huge trunk' that they had set up in the breezeway. On the day they left, 'Sylvia was wearing her hair in a long braid down her back with a little red wool cap on her head.' She looked like a teenage girl going off to boarding school. As



the train pulled out of the station, Ted shouted out, 'We'll be back in two years!' He was looking forward to home, and English beer, having found the American variety 'unspeakable and unspewable'.

On a clear blue day in March 1959, Ted and Sylvia had gone out from their little Willow Street apartment to Winthrop, the southernmost point of Boston's North Shore. In the morning, Sylvia had been with her psychoanalyst, probing further at her feelings about her dead father.

It was time, they decided, for her to visit Otto Plath's grave in Winthrop for the first time. When they found it, she felt cheated by the plain and unassuming flat stone, tempted to dig him up in order to 'prove he existed and really was dead'.

Then they walked over some rocks beside the ocean. The wind was bitter. Their feet got wet and they picked up shells with cold hands. Ted walked alone to the end of the bar, in his black coat, 'defining the distance of stones and stones humped out of the sea.' Afterwards, Sylvia wrote a poem called 'Man in Black.' It was soon accepted by the *New Yorker*, one of her first big successes in getting her work into high-profile print. It catches the moment: the breakwaters absorbing the force of the sea, the March ice on the rock pools, 'And you' – Ted, that is – striding out across the white stones:

in your dead
Black coat, black shoes, and your
Black hair ...

There he stands, a 'Fixed vortex' on the edge of the land, holding it all together, the stones, the air, Sylvia's life and her father's death. The line-break catapults the word 'dead' into double sense. At one level, Ted's coat is dead black in the sense of pitch black. At another level, it is black because black is the colour of death. Sylvia's black imagination has indeed dug Otto out of his grave – and reincarnated him in her husband.

.....
From *Ted Hughes* by Jonathan Bate
Copyright © 2015 by Jonathan Bate.
Reprinted courtesy of Harper, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Homecoming

Newest Board Member Has Strong Links to Our Past and Future

We are delighted to announce that attorney Willis J. Goldsmith was elected to Membership at our board meeting in September.

Goldsmith's association with Yaddo goes back many years. Raised in Saratoga Springs – he returns frequently to visit family who still live in town – he was a recipient of the Yaddo Medal, which is awarded annually to two Saratoga Springs High School seniors, one man and one woman, who exemplify academic excellence and character. He earned his undergraduate degree at Brown and his law degree at New York University. A Jones Day partner since 1983, and resident in the firm's New York City office since 2005, he chaired the firm's labor and employment practice for many years and subsequently headed the New York office. He continues to represent management clients across the country in labor



and employment matters. His many career highlights include successfully arguing a US Supreme Court case on behalf of the US Chamber of Commerce and representing the New York Philharmonic in its negotiations with the American Federation of Musicians. He and his wife Marilyn have a deep appreciation for the arts, especially theater and classical music. In addition to Yaddo, he has long been associated with Applesseed, a nonprofit network of seventeen public interest justice centers, and currently serves as a member of the board. He recently completed a six-year term as a member of the board of the Legal Aid Society of New York.

MILESTONES ...

Member Deborah Berke has been appointed dean of the Yale School of Architecture. When she assumes the role on July 1, 2016, she will be the first woman at the helm since Yale started teaching architecture a hundred years ago.

Meanwhile, Susan Brynteson, longtime Member and Recording Secretary, has retired after thirty-five years as vice-provost of libraries at the University of Delaware. Under her leadership, the library system developed a strong research focus, became a pioneer in offering state-wide programs on information literacy, and acquired the senatorial archive of Vice President Joseph Biden.

Out and About: Yaddo in Conversation

Our fall was eventful, in every sense: as either the host or invited guest, we were busy engaging in talks and forums in Saratoga and farther afield on topics that ranged from diversity in the arts to psychology and global conflict.

Empathy and intellect were on display when Yaddo writer and board member Andrew Solomon, professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University and the president of PEN America, appeared at NYU Washington DC on October 7. Solomon and Yaddo President Elaina Richardson discussed the genesis of his award-winning book *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*; his reportage from Afghanistan; and the effect of screen time on learning. A catalyst for much of the exchange was his forthcoming book *Far and Away: Reports from the Brink of Change: Seven Continents, Twenty-Five Years*, a selection of essays about cultural transformation.

Give Me Shelter: Perri Klass on Mothers, Medicine, and Refuge

The Community Foundation Board for the Greater Capital Region supports philanthropy in our region by matching donors to their interests, including the arts, and we were delighted to host them at Yaddo on an afternoon in late September. Karen Bilowith, the Foundation's board chair, was joined by thirty guests, many of whom were at Yaddo for the first time.

After a hard-hat tour of one of the five new live-work studios currently under construction and a walk through the Greenhouse Studios, which opened in 2013, the group joined Yaddo writer Perri Klass, a practicing physician; professor of pediatrics and journalism at New York University; children's book author, novelist, nonfiction writer; and



Photo by Anika Mian

regular contributor to the New York Times, for conversation.

In residence in 2008, 2009, and 2010, Perri Klass is a second-generation Yaddo artist: her mother, Sheila Solomon Klass, author of nineteen books, was a guest for a month in 1974. Klass recalled her mother's "messianic passion for writing" and said that she believed her mother was "never more herself" than she was in the month she was at Yaddo; at other times, the busy English professor and mother of three had to write between five and seven in the morning. Growing up in a household "knowing that there was something so special going on in the attic that [her] mother would get up at five to do it," Klass knew that writing would be part of her life as well. She spoke of the leaps in creativity and productivity that are possible at Yaddo, saying: "you don't know what you're capable of doing" until you have a period of uninterrupted time and privacy to create.

While Yaddo's virtues as a retreat in this sense are well known, Klass also called attention to another aspect of our history — as a safe place for challenging ideas. She talked

about finding herself at the center of a public health storm in 2009, when she published a piece for the *Times* on parental anxieties over the H1N1 vaccine. Her hospital had a supply, and she took calls both from parents who wanted it at all costs and by parents whose hostility to vaccines outweighed their panic over the flu. When the article came out, she received a threatening letter that was investigated by the FBI. As she noted, there are a great many other Yaddo writers whose work addresses controversial topics or takes them to turbulent areas of the world.

Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and the Evolving 21st-Century Residency

When Yaddo was founded in 1900, it was one of only a handful of artist residency programs in the world — virtually the only game in town. Today, there are over 1500. Many of these newer residency programs operate along very different lines than our own, eschewing the retreat model for community engagement. Yaddo's annual board meeting this past September featured a panel discussion on new models of

supporting creativity curated by one of our Directors, Laura Callanan. Lisa Hoffman, associate director of McColl Center for Art + Innovation in Charlotte, and Alyce Myatt, an independent consultant working with the Maryland Institute College of Art, joined us to share their insights. Trained as a botanist, Hoffman said that the McColl Center, built in the 1990s in the ruins of a church, serves as an “intermediary” between artists and community. For example, one of the earliest projects she oversaw brought together artist Aurora Robson, sculpture classes at a local community college, Charlotte’s Parks and Recreation Department, and residents of the Anita Stroud Park neighborhood; under Robson’s direction, the college students made artifacts out of plastic recovered from a streambed and held an auction to benefit local improvements. Myatt, an expert in media arts and philanthropy, spoke about MICA’s new Baltimore’s Artists Support for Economy and Equality initiative, whose goal is to connect artists to resources and help them launch sustainable businesses. The session was the start of a conversation that we hope to continue in the years ahead about ways that Yaddo can incorporate fresh approaches while staying true to our core mission.

Opening Doors and Dialogue

How to encourage greater diversity in residencies was the topic of a highly anticipated panel at the annual conference of the Alliance of Artists Communities, which was held in Providence, Rhode Island, from October 13 through October 16. Yaddo President Elaina Richardson and Kemi Ilesamni, executive director of the community-arts-based Laundromat Project, used Yaddo as a case study to discuss issues of outreach and community building. (Support for Ilesamni’s report on underrepresented groups at Yaddo was provided by the Hearst Foundation.) Mario Garcia Durham, president of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, moderated. The

conference kicked off the AAC’s twenty-five-year anniversary and had a record-breaking number of attendees. Yaddo was recognized as a charter member of the Alliance on several occasions throughout the four days.



ABOVE: Audience at Yaddo’s panel (Open Doors) at the Alliance of Artists Communities conference. Photo by Murray Scott.



WHILE SIGNING COPIES of *The Fox* at the Comics Depot in downtown Saratoga Springs, writer/illustrator **Dean Haspiel** got a visit from filmmaker **Mitch McCabe**. Both were in residence this summer.

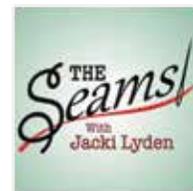
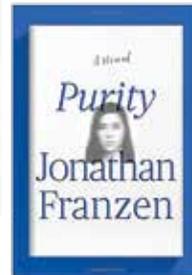
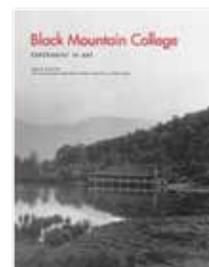
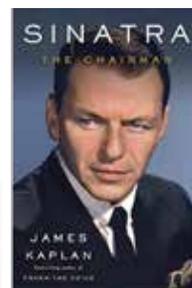


Haspiel’s new graphic novel *Beef with Tomato*, an account of his move from Manhattan to Brooklyn in the late 1990s, complete with surreal misadventures, was published by Alternative Comics this fall. Fellow Yaddo writer **Jonathan Ames** wrote the introduction.

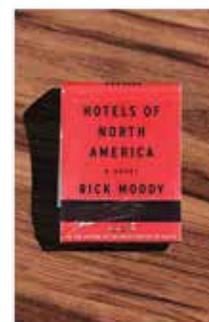
FRIDAY NIGHT

Brought to You by Yaddo

Crisp fall days encourage curling up with a good book. And Yaddo’s authors have you covered. There’s **Jonathan Franzen’s** epic *Purity* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), **Rick Moody’s** witty *Hotels of North America*, and **James Kaplan’s** *Sinatra: The Chairman* (Doubleday), a follow-up to *Frank: The Voice*, that gives us the singer at the peak of his power, for good and ill. **Jacob Lawrence**, subject of a major exhibition at MoMA this year, gets an encore at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, where *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957* is on view; Lawrence taught at the college in 1946. (Before you go, reread **Vincent Katz’s** introduction to *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art* (The MIT Press).) As we change over our closets for the new season, it’s a good time to listen to **Jacki Lyden’s** podcast *The Seams*, on clothes and their meaning. In December, Todd Haynes’s adaptation of **Patricia Highsmith’s** *Carol*,



originally published as *The Price of Salt*, hits theaters. Cate Blanchett plays the upper-class Carol, Rooney Mara the salesclerk (and aspiring set designer) she falls in love with, in the 1950s.





Yaddo

P.O. Box 395
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SARATOGA SPGS, NY
PERMIT NO. 52



GETTING REAL: Fall sunlight beamed on one of our five new live-work studios under construction, when our Board had a tour this September. Framing is complete, and plumbing and electrical installation has begun. One of our wonderful new spaces has been fully funded by a generous grant from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation and will be named for Helen, who spent time at Yaddo and served on our board. The first residents will be snugly in residence before you know it!

Photo by Shane Cassidy

Photo by Dana McClure