Yaddo
NEWS | SPRING 2020

• Mentors and more in Yaddo Connections

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  15 books on our must-read list

• Introducing...
  the Yaddo Composer Playlist!

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In case of emergency... ART
That's frightening, so much wrong. But if this virus shows us anything, it's that we're interconnected... We have to keep each other afloat, even when we can't touch. Art is a place where that can happen, where ideas and people are made welcome. It's a place where that can happen, where artists can be, most of us are not out saving lives... Something is cleaner.

As the world struggles to get ahead of the Covid-19 pandemic, we here at Yaddo are working to make decisions to put us on the best path going forward, one that will allow us to recover from this time and sustain our mission for decades to come. After much thoughtful discussion on the part of the Board, we decided that the soundest course of action was to close Yaddo for the remainder of the year.

Why is this necessary? For Yaddo to reopen, we need a global all-clear. Epidemiologists agree that the apex of this pandemic will occur in rolling waves and may return in the fall after a dormant period. Sadly, we must rededicate all those who work on our calendar for a year. We made the decision to avoid the harmful effects of rolling cancellations, which are disruptive and disheartening and can put artists on unsteady ground. We understand the many sacrifices artists will have to make to Yaddo such as restructuring, canceling work plans, childcare/caregiving, and lost income, to name a few. Nothing now hopefully brings clarity rather than making things worse than instead of late cancellations notification.

At the same time, Yaddo's endowment has suffered as the global economy fell, with a current loss of over 17% and no clear "bottom" for the markets. We have canceled or postponed events at least from the start of March until the end of October of 2020, suffering a loss of over $600,000 in revenue. It costs about $330,000 a month to run Yaddo, so the economic stress is real.

In light of economic concerns, we acted quickly to be both fairly prudent and to protect our staff: Yaddo will cover health insurance costs, including the employee portion should someone be furloughed— an extraordinary measure for a non-profit, but one that the Executive Committee unanimously supported. Some senior staff are also taking pay cuts—20% in the case of the President.

Nothing would please us more than to find that we have been unduly pessimistic. If so, we will resume revenue and reopen. We're doing all we can to ensure emergency funding (including successfully applying for aid under the federal CARES Act) and to carefully manage resources. The plan is to come out the other side of this with resilience, to have Yaddo remain a leader in the field, and to return to "regular life" when it is safe to do so. We will stay in touch and let you know when the "return" decision is made.

We've appreciated hearing from many of you and know there's a strong desire to help at this moment. Here are a few ideas for what you might do: If you're able to offer financial support, please do so as generously as you can. Join us for Virtual Yaddo projects. Have patience as we adjust to reduced numbers and sometimes inadequate home technology.

We hope you and your circle of loved ones stay safe during this challenging time.

The world is watching.
Summer Reads, Brought to You by Yaddo

Designer babies, smoking guns, Russian heroes and more in this season’s new releases by Yaddo authors

**NEW NOIR**

Long Bright River.
Liz Moore’s instant bestseller, follows a police woman in search of her estranged sister amid an opioid epidemic, illuminating the rot, the shiny facades of gentrification and the sturdy endurance of small pockets of community life” (The Washington Post).

Trouble Is What I Do
by Walter Mosley
resists ex boxers and NYC private eye Leonard McGill from The Long Fall, as he delivers a message from Philip “Calliah” Worry, a 94-year-old African American blues musician, to the daughter of a murderous billionaire plotting to hide his heritage.

**MINING TRAGEDY**

Anna Carson’s play
Norma Jean-Baker of Troy, which premiered last spring at The Shed in NYC, is a retelling of Euclid’s Helen, with Marilyn Monroe, Arthur Miller and Truman Capote as characters. “Carson—legendary poet, classicist, heartbreaker—is known for her eviscerating ability to take myth and move it into a local hotel, without ever letting the divine implications of the story wash” (Bookforum).

**KNOCKOUT NONFICTION**

Designing Babies: How Technology is Changing the Ways
We Create Children
by Robert Klitzman, MD, takes a hard look at the ethical, moral and social dilemmas posed by advances in reproductive technologies, especially in the “Wild West” United States, where the industry is largely unregulated.

Cathy Park Hong’s
Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning is a “formidable new essay collection...that bled a dormant discomfort out of me with surgical precision,” wrote Jia Tolentino, staff writer for The New Yorker. Hong, who has published three poetry collections, credits a Richard Pryor performance with giving her a wake-up call, egging her on to explore racial identity and her “deep cone of shame” with humor and honesty.

**FAMILY QUEST**

Louise Erdrich issues a call to arms with This Night Watchman, a novel based on the life of her grandmother who worked as a night watchman at a factory in the 1950s and carried the fight against Native dispossession from rural North Dakota to Washington, D.C. “She delivers a magisterial epic that brings her power of witness to every page” (The New York Times).

**GOOD GRIEF**

Terry McMillan tackles aging in her latest novel, It’s Not All Downhill from Here. Wagra jokes, BFFs and a dog named B.B. King come together in this story centered on a remarkable woman’s attempt to “pump up the volume” at age 68. “Life can be a stroll,” McMillan told NPR. “It can be a roller coaster ride. It can be

Antonia Vega’s world is upsended when an undocumented Mexican worker arrives on her doorstep in Afterlife, Julia Alvarez’s new novel, a “gorgeously intimate portrait of an immigrant writer and recent widow carving out hope in the face of crisis” (The New York Times). Vega, a 68-year-old Cuban-American, is a well-known poet, artist and novelist. She met her husband, a Cuban emigre, in the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood of New York City, where she was attending art school.

**Writers to Watch**

Shayla Lawson’s This is My War: Notes on Diane Ross, Dark Girls, and Beyoncé, an essay collection that mixes music, Tinder, high-school theater, racist cartoons, and her time working for an ad agency selling “black cool,” among other rich topics.

Alex Halberstadt traces how trauma impacts generations of his family in Young Heroes of the Soviet Union, a “love and mournful account that’s also skeptical, surprising and often very funny” (The New York Times). He tracked down his grandfather, a former bodyguard to Joseph Stalin, traveled to Lithuania, where his Jewish mother barely survived the Holocaust, and returned to his birthplace in Moscow over the course of a decade while researching this memoir.

**Reasons to Click**

While this is a challenging time for everyone—especially writers, publishers and bookstores coping with canceled tours, lost income and overall uncertainty—readers take heart: Many author events have popped up online. Buy books, tune in!

- **Northshire Live** — Thursdays, 5 PM, Zoom
Northshire Bookstore is offering free shipping and a virtual events series with featured authors (such as Yaddo novelist Stephen Kiernan on May 21) every Thursday at 5 PM via Zoom. Northshire.com.

- **NYPL Connect**
The New York Public Library (NYPL.org) and public radio station WNYC are hosting a virtual book club. Patrons can borrow more than 300 thousand books for free through the library’s e-reader app, and join the livestream conversations with authors.

- **Big Texas Read**
Join the Lone Star State in reading Yaddo author David Samuel Levinson’s novel Tell Me How This Ends Well, a dystopian comedy. The fun includes Zoom chats, raffles, contests and more—geminthink.org.

- **Politics & Prose**
Take a virtual class with Politics and Prose, another godsend of a bookstore. P&P Live, a virtual event series, has a packed calendar with author events including some Yaddo artists such as Tommy Orange and Amy Gaine (Politics-prose.com).

- **Center for Fiction**
BYO Book for a virtual happy hour, or tune into one of CFF’s online events with Yaddo artists Paul Lisicky, Julia Alvarez and more—Centerforfiction.org.

- **Yaddo Authors Bookshop**
Visit our online bookshop to support local bookstores; shop new releases as well as select highlights from Yaddo authors—shop.yaddo.org.
A Taste of Yaddo: Virtual Variations

We’re finding new ways to bring extraordinary artists into conversation with our extended family of loyal supporters, book lovers and art collectors. Virtual Variations will showcase an array of exceptional talents like Broadway’s Michael Korie, a Tony nominee...award-winning poet Nick Flynn...Kevin Wilson, author of the hit The Family Fang...leading journalists Rana Abozeid and Robert Worth—and many more.

We look forward to inviting you to join our new digital community. As we turn to the arts for solace in these difficult days, here’s a first look at a frank, funny conversation between two of Yaddo’s most acclaimed memoirists, Patricia Volk and Benjamin Taylor.

Taylor’s new book, Here We Are, probes his close friendship with Yaddo titan Philip Roth, and reveals the man behind the public persona.

Patricia Volk: Is there anything in the book Philip might feel betrayed by?

Benjamin Taylor: Yes, he felt himself to be omniscient. I challenge this.

PV: In these pages, which Louise Enich called “unapologetic, yet loyal and kind,” you come across as intellectual peers. You’re not afraid to criticize Philip or tell him he’s gone too far. Could you address that?

BT: You know, he and I in nearly two decades of friendship never had a single falling out or even a cross word.... He was a kvetch, as all great writers are. Don’t you imagine this was Thomas Mann’s personality too? And I know it was Saul Bellow’s.

PV: You were with him at the end, but so were many of his former lovers. I’ve always wondered, how did Philip maintain those relationships, having the women together in the same room and having it be harmonious?

BT: He was determined to have them all back in his later years.... and that was the scene at the hospital as he lay dying. This I know: my hospital room would not be full of ex-lovers.

PV: [Laughs]. You mention Claire (Roth’s ex-wife, actress Claire Bloom), and I wonder if Philip’s disdain for the theater...had anything to do with Claire.

BT: I don’t know...He said to me once, “The most fundamental artists of all are actors and actresses...” Women don’t like it when men they are married to have other lovers. It’s just as simple as that. Philip was polyamorous in the extreme, just to use a nice word. One evening at dinner, I used the word “philanderer,” and he said: “We’re all better off without that word.”

PV: [Laughs] Would he have preferred “lothario”?

BT: I think “philanderer” was his least favorite word in the language. The word he loved best was “away.”

PV: Yes – what is that, can you explain that? Is that a metaphor?


Actor and philanthropist Rufus Collins has appeared on and off-Broadway in The Dead 1904, The Royal Family, To Be or Not To Be, A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, and An Ideal Husband, among other productions. He has also worked extensively in film and television. Collins is a Trustee of the Morris and Alma Schapiro Fund, a private foundation supporting the arts, education, and health organizations. He is a graduate of Columbia University and the Central School of Speech and Drama, London, and his connection to Yaddo runs in the family: His mother Linda Collins was a longtime Yaddo board member.
Who do you admire? We pulled archival gems and asked a few of our artists to name an influential peer.

**JENN SHAPLAND**

From therapy transcripts and a stay in Carson McCullers’ childhood home to visiting Yaddo, Jenn Shapland followed her aunt to a better understanding of her own true self, and one of our most enigmatic writers.

I wasn’t expecting love letters. The paper was bronzed with age and wrinkled at the edges. Annemarie’s handwriting filled the page, bearing hard to the right and often spilling back up the left-hand margin with last additions. I read through clear Milar sleeves, too internainous to remove the pages from their housings. April 10th, at night Carson, child, my beloved, you know that, leaving the Day after tomorrow, feeling half afraid and proud, Leaving behind me all I care for, once again, and a Wave of love—

I looked up at the rows of manuscript boxes that surrounded me, mind humming, face flushed. Did that mean what I thought it meant? I read on…

I found the letters at the tail end of the major, slow-burning catastrophe of my twenties: never quite breaking up with my first love, a woman from Texas I’d met our freshman year of college in Vermont, after six closeted years together. In my second year of a six-year PhD program, I was already bored sick of academia. I didn’t want to be a literary critic, couldn’t stand the institutional hoops as I was jumping through them, and only six months into my internship I could tell I wasn’t cut out to be an archivist.

I didn’t have the patience, and I spent too much time trying to solve mysteries of my own creation. I got an email out of the blue from one of my professors admiring my writing, and I jumped at what felt like validation. The praise continued, along with a barrage of poems and pressure to sleep with him, which I did, unsure exactly how I got there. My six-year relationship dissolved, and I moved out of our apartment. I was twenty-five and, when I wasn’t drunk on a porch smoking angry cigarettes with my friends, I was exquisitely alone for the first time in my life in a new, overpriced studio apartment I couldn’t afford. The dishwasher was full of roaches. The roaches were judging me. I was perplexed by my own behavior. I didn’t know if I wanted to date women—I never really had; my first love and I publicly remained “roommates” for all those years—but, on the heels of manipulation, dateTime seemed pretty distant. Like most twenty-five-year-olds, I couldn’t figure out what came next. What came next was Carson.

Adapted from My Autobiography of Carson McCullers: A Memoir by Jenn Shapland.

**STONE’S THROW**

First a guest at Yaddo in 1967, the late Robert Stone was a literary wild man, raconteur, and friend and contemporary of Ken Kesey. He drank occasionally, emoted three packs a day, consumed copious drugs and, despite his decades-long marriage, had “a woman in every port and two more at Yaddo” (The New York Times). Here’s a brief excerpt of Thomas Bell’s review on the new biography of his fellow Yaddo alum, the legendary Bob Stone:

In 1988, speaking at a literary conference in Sicily sponsored by PEN American Center, Stone remarked: “Life in collision with language produces the necessity of interpretation. We cannot take things whole all at once; we would be swept away.”

Collisions play an important role in the novels of Robert Stone. He tended to develop plots in which several discrete characters move through time like figures lost in a maze. A reader can see each one of them, but much of the narrative tension involves anticipating, and slowly perceiving, the ways these different characters will crash into one another. Once, at a reading, I heard an audience member posit that Stone’s first three novels, A Hall of Mirrors (1967), Dog Soldiers, and A Flag for Sunrise (1981), were as strong an opening trio of novels as any written by an American. I would agree with that assessment.

The second half of the quote, about not being able to “take things whole all at once,” feels ironic in a biography as wounding and meticulous as this. [Madison Smartt Bell] tells us all the many pieces of Stone’s life and the composition of his writing, and some analysis, as well. It’s an illuminating appendix to a master’s body of work.

Yaddo Connections: Artists on Artists

I’d never met a composer until I came to Yaddo. Given my decades spent maintaining it with book binders on, music hadn’t occurred to me. That winter, Steven Sametz blasted West House with choral cocain and I was blown away. Do you hear notes all at once? Do you use a pencil or pen… Only a piano… How do you find what comes next… What do you listen to? How does it first occur to you? Astonishing, really.

Now that I work in the Yaddo Office, I meet lots of composers. Last week, one called me once to ask about my chair. Pencils, music notation software and chairs, I hear a lot about.

Scrolling through the online list of Yaddo composers, Rob says, “Wow, so many great artists here.” I beg anecdotes. He tells me that he was in residence with Alvin Singleton, who would gather with the other composers at lunch and boast about his coffee machine. He invited them over, and they joined him. And? “It was really good coffee.” Rob says.

Composers are obsessive, bless them, and like writers, they share work with each other (who knew?). “Ned Rorem and I were composer pen pals for a while” Rob says. “I sent him some work, and he replied, said glowing things — he really loved my work, all except for one piece… but he didn’t tell me which piece.”

All in all, Rob said wonderful things about Yaddo composers, including David del Tredici, Steven Burke, Sebastian Currier, Daron Hagen and George Tsontakis. We decided to create an online Yaddo Composer Playlist: Here’s the link: yaddo.org/composers-are-cool. Stay tuned (teaser alert: a lot of David del Tredici’s music is about sex.)

HUNGER FOR FORM

“The threadbare opposition of nature and art—often miscast in aesthetic terms as authenticity versus theatricality—is beautifully scrambled on Green’s canvases. And to appreciate nature’s formality of purpose is to arrive at a fresh vision of our fundamentally human hunger for form.”

—Jana Prikryl on Elliott Green

Jana Prikryl is the author of two poetry collections, No Matter and The After Party. Elliott Green’s Far Edge of the Known World, a lavish volume of paintings paired with essays, came out in January.

Left: The Photon Skirt, Elliott Green

TWO OF A KIND

James Baldwin on Beauford Delaney

My soul looks back and wonders how I got over—indeed but I find it unexpectedly difficult to remember, in detail, how I got started…

I do remember how my life in Greenwich Village began—which is, essentially, how my career began—for it began when I was fifteen.

One day, [a friend] played hookey without me and went down to Greenwich Village and made the acquaintance of Beauford Delaney. The next day, he told me about this wonderful man he had met, a black—then, Negro, or Colored—painter and said that I must meet him: and he gave me Beauford Delaney’s address.

I had a Dickensian job, after school, in a sweat shop on Canal Street, and was getting on so badly at home that I dreaded going home: and, so, sometime later, I went to 181 Greene Street, where Beauford lived then, and introduced myself. I was terrified, once I had climbed those stairs and knocked on that door. A short, round brown man came to the door and looked at me. He had the most extraordinary eyes I’d ever seen. When he had completed his instant X-ray of my brain, lungs, liver, heart, bowels, and spinal column… he smiled and said, “Come in,” and opened the door.

He opened the door all right. Lord, I was to hear Beauford sing, later, and for many years, open the unusual door. Beauford was the first walking, living proof, for me, that a black man could be an artist.

Excerpted from The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985 by James Baldwin

Playing Ping Pong with Claude Brown at Yaddo

Manchild was long done and behind him; he’d revisited Harlem and seen its change. The streets he’d known—more dangerous now, the stakes higher. Summer at Yaddo in the pool house at the ping pong table. I’d been taught boys. I put a mean spin on the acetate ball and sent it through the air, but it slammed back at me faster than my eye could take it. My opponent was kind but quick, full of good advice. Hold it this way, he said that day, and pointed the wooden paddle down. Hold it, he said, like a gun.

—I MYRA SKLAREW

Myra Sklarew is the former President of Yaddo and the author of many books, including her latest, A Survivor Named Trauma: Holocaust Memory in Lithuania. “Playing Ping Pong with Claude Brown at Yaddo” was published in Poet Lore in 2018.

The late Claude Brown is the author of Manchild in the Promised Land, a critically acclaimed account of growing up in 1940s Harlem.
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When **Amy Sillman**—a visual artist who redefined contemporary painting, pushing the medium into installations, prints, zines, animation and architecture—curated *The Shape of a Shape* for the Artist's Choice series at MoMA, she “wanted a room that teemed obscenely” (*Artnet*). The resulting “joyous cacophony… is not only preternaturally brilliant” (*Texte Zur Kunst*), but breaks the museum mold of movement-dependent chronologies and other stale organizational hierarchies. Her “aha!” moment? Shadow as muse: “They’re illusory, uncertain,” Sillman told *Artnet*. “They represent both presence and absence. Finessing shape to shadow, I arrived at a list of nervous works with more specificity, ambivalence, flesh and psychology, a kind of trouble in them. I wanted the installation to involve the whole body [from] the ground up.”

Background: Installation view of Artist’s Choice: Amy Sillman—The Shape of Shape, © 2019 The Museum of Modern Art. PHOTO: HEIDI BOHRENKAMP

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**Amy Sillman**, who first came to Yaddo in 1984, is working on new paintings and drawings for an exhibition of her work, which will soon be on view at the Gladstone Gallery in New York City. A new book covering two decades of her work just came out.

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**Out of the Shadows**

In January, *Architectural Digest* published a piece by Yaddo artist **Anne Korkeakivi** on the restoration of our historic Mansion:

“The story of Yaddo is one of turning the worst sort of loss into beauty, not only for its artist residents but also for the public, who enjoy the fruit of their labors. ‘One sonnet would justify the whole experiment and render it immortal,’ the New York *Herald Tribune* wrote of the fledgling retreat nearly a century ago. Done! But Yaddo is not resting on its laurels.”

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**Yaddo is a Retreat for Artists** located on a 400-acre estate in Saratoga Springs, New York. Its mission is to nurture the creative process by providing an opportunity for artists to work without interruption in a supportive environment. Yaddo offers residencies to artists from all nations and backgrounds working in the following disciplines: choreography, film, literature, musical composition, the visual arts, performance, and video. They are selected by panels of other professional artists without regard to financial means. Residencies last from two weeks to two months and include room, board, and a studio. Yaddo’s extensive grounds and buildings were designated a National Historic Landmark in 2013.