

EVENT TITLE: Contemporary Writing at an Art School: A Reading by Alumni & Faculty from UArts

EVENT DESCRIPTION: How does an arts-centric education affect a student's development as a writer? How does teaching at an art school influence a writer's approach to craft? This reading features work by alumni and faculty from the University of the Arts, a uniquely arts-based university in Center City Philadelphia and home to the region's only Creative Writing BFA.

EVENT CATEGORY: Multiple Genres Literary Reading

Event Organizer

Elise Juska is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of the Arts, where she received the Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching. She is the author of five novels, most recently *If We Had Known*. Her short stories have appeared in journals including *Ploughshares*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *Missouri Review* and longlisted for the *Best American Short Stories* and Pushcart Prize anthologies.

Event Moderator

Steven Kleinman is the author of *Life Cycle of a Bear*, winner of the 2019 Philip Levine Poetry Prize. He is the interim director of the Creative Writing program at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and a contributing editor and podcast co-host at the *American Poetry Review*.

Event Participants

Rahul Mehta is the author of two books of fiction, both published by HarperCollins: a novel, *No Other World*, which was one of *Booklist's* Top Ten Debut Novels of 2017, and a short story collection, *Quarantine*, which won the 2011 Lambda Literary Award for Gay Debut Fiction and the Asian American Literary Award for Fiction. Their collection of poems and lyric essays, *My Tarot Told Me To Quit Twitter and Other Truths*, is forthcoming from the University Press of Kentucky.

MeeRee Orlandini is a poet and fiction writer based in Philadelphia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as *jubilat*, the *American Poetry Review*, and the *Cleveland Review of Books*. She coordinates the University of the Arts' Pre-College Creative Writing program and teaches at Germantown Friends School.

Glorious Piner is a poet from Philadelphia, studying poetry at the University of Maryland. Her work can be found in journals such as the *American Poetry Review*, *The Florida Review*, and more. She co-hosts a forthcoming podcast on the study and practice of literature called “The Speakeasy.”

Opening Remarks

Steven Kleinman will introduce and identify all speakers. He will provide background on the University of the Arts, an arts-based four-year university in Center City Philadelphia, describing the current culture and curriculum, which includes performing arts, visual arts, and as of 2013, a BFA in Creative Writing.

Participant Remarks & Readings

Steven Kleinman will ask each speaker to reflect on how learning or teaching creative writing at an art school has influenced their work as a writer. Each participant will offer brief remarks, then read from their work.

Elise Juska: To teach at an arts-centered university is to be surrounded by students who believe in the value of a creative life. It’s a life that requires boldness. In my fiction writing courses, I’m constantly surprised and moved by my students’ willingness to be bold and take risks, whether it’s in their approach to untraditional narratives or their openness to challenging subjects or their commitment to the shared endeavor of making art. I find my own work has gotten more daring as a result, both what I choose to write about and the honesty with which I write it. Today I’ll read the beginning of an essay, “The New Vigilance,” which was inspired both directly and indirectly by my teaching and my students.

Steven Kleinman: The thing about our students is that they are sharp in vision, and they push themselves to learn as much as they can. They ask great questions, some of which are easy to answer, and some I have no idea how to answer. So teaching at the University of the Arts requires me to rethink my own assumptions about writing in a very generative way. Each semester I am surprised by a new writer's approach to poetry and poetics. I am surprised by how wild and considered these students can be. I am inspired by my students to try new things, and to work my way into more and more difficult, uncomfortable, and open poems. Today I will read poems from my recent collection, *Life Cycle of a Bear*.

Rahul Mehta: Working in a community of artists creating in all different forms and mediums has expanded my sense of possibilities. I have learned so many new generative techniques and approaches to art-making from my students and colleagues across disciplines, and I find that—in this supportive environment

where art is celebrated every day—I am more willing to take risks and to try new things. Indeed, the fact that I am now publishing a book of poems and lyric essays after training and publishing in fiction writing these past 15+ years is a testament to the inspiration I find working in this community of makers. Today, I'll be reading a few short pieces from that forthcoming collection.

Glorious Piner: Every day, I am astounded in new ways by how the University of the Arts' frameworks for thinking about literature opened, and continue to open, new possibilities for my critical and creative works. Because of the university's imperative on exploring what can be done in writing—as opposed to what has been done in writing—I have learned to critically assess the possibilities afforded by contemporary, modern, and even classical aesthetics. While teaching undergraduate students at the University of Maryland, I have found myself eagerly and naturally embracing this posture toward literature. This principle of possibility has made me the serious thinker, close reader, and risk-taking writer that I am today. I will read the poems “A Portrait of the Word,” “Fragments (An Elegy for Toni Morrison),” “Catullus XCII (Translation),” and readings by poets with whose work I am currently obsessed (tbd).

MeeRee Orlandini: The greatest thing art school has done for me is expose me to creative individuals and creative processes. Learning how to experience art has given me a solid understanding of the ways society is reflected in everyday and special objects and the ways narrative and context shape small routines as well as whole belief systems and cultures—all of which helps to inspire and make me a better writer and observer of the world. I will read two short poems and a scene from a short story.

The reading will conclusion with a brief audience q&a.