

Event Outline for AWP Panel:

Writers are Laborers Too: Building the Road to Relief, Recovery, and Representation

Scheduled Day: Thursday, March 24, 2022

Scheduled Time: 1:45 PM – 3:00 PM ET

Location: #AWP22 Virtual Conference Platform

EVENT DESCRIPTION

In the wake of COVID, many arts communities, including literary communities and literary artists have been devastated. As we emerge from the pandemic, arts activists are looking beyond relief to ways of deeply rebuilding the structures by which artists can be supported. These include advocating for a dedicated secretary for arts and culture, building a new federal writers project, speaking clearly about the role of the arts in civic life and cultural repair and building government funding models that recognize and channel artists' enormous contribution to economies and communities. In all this, can there be a new new deal for artists? What might it include? Four thinkers on the forefront of how the arts build equity talk about arts activism now; art as labor; art as a component of repair and reparation; and discuss current initiatives designed to create a richer, more abundant future for working artists.

After a devastating season for arts communities, artists across the country are organizing and joining in movements to create better working conditions for artists and a more sustainable future life for the arts. This conversation will be dedicated to exploring concrete political actions which are helping to expand the sustainability and resilience of artists communities and artist's working conditions, including Tess Taylor's article "Getting On with It: Art as Civic Repair" in *Harper's Magazine* (June 18 2021), which looks to Northern Ireland's recent civic work supporting the arts and bringing communities together; the recent introduction of H.R. 3054, a [renewed Federal Writers' Project bill](#) by U.S. Reps. Ted Lieu (D-CA) and Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM), as well as the current \$1B ask from Californians for the Arts, the DAWN Act, and a new Arts Relief proposal; a recent NEA study on the role of the arts in social cohesion.; art as labor and what that means for the economy, and why this is the best time for arts workers, business leaders, and legislators to come together and create jobs all across the state.

After the moderator introduces the panel topic, each poet will introduce themselves then proceed to share for approximately 5-10 minutes (using visual and audio presentation formats). Poets will then pose questions to one another for conversation before opening for audience discussion and participation.

CATEGORY

Arts and Activism

EVENT ORGANIZER

Tess Taylor is the author of five collections of poetry, including *The Misremembered World*, selected by Eavan Boland for the Poetry Society of America's inaugural chapbook fellowship, and *The Forage House*, called "stunning" by *The San Francisco Chronicle*. *Work & Days* was named one of The New York Times best books of poetry of 2016. In spring 2020 she published two celebrated books of poems set in California. *Last West* was commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art as a part of the *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures* exhibition; *Rift Zone*, from Red Hen Press, was hailed as "brilliant" in the LA Times and named one of the best books of 2020 by The Boston Globe. She is currently on the faculty of Ashland University's Low-Res MFA Creative Writing Program. She has just published a feature article in Harper's about the role of the arts in cultural repair. She lives in El Cerrito California.

EVENT MODERATOR

TBD

EVENT PARTICIPANTS

Cathy Linh Che is the Executive Director at Kundiman and has worked in nonprofit administration, education, and publishing for over 15 years. Cathy is the author of the poetry collection *Split* (Alice James Books), winner of the Kundiman Poetry Prize, Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America, and the Best Poetry Book Award from the Association of Asian American Studies.

Matthew-Lee Erlbach is Co-Founder/Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy, Arts Workers United | Be An Arts Hero. He is a writer, actor, and organizer from Chicago and New York, proudly living and working out of Los Feliz. In addition to writing for several TV series in and around L.A., he has lobbied for Arts Worker relief in California, and has collaborated with the Midnight Mission's Homelight program in Inglewood, to create a writing program for single mothers transitioning out of homelessness. He is a proud member of SAG-AFTRA, WGA, and co-founder of AWU.

David Haynes is an emeritus professor of English at Southern Methodist University and has spent 25-year teaching in the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College. He has written seven novels for adults and five books for younger readers. His most recent is *A Star in the Face of the Sky*; *Martha's Daughter*, a *Novella* and *sStories*, will appear in the next year or two. He is the Board Chair for Kimbilio.

David Kipen served as Director of Literature for the NEA under both Republican and Democratic administrations. These days he writes everywhere from the *Nation* to the *Wall Street Journal*, teaches writing at UCLA, and is the founder of Libros Schimbros, an 11-year-old storefront nonprofit lending library in a historically working-class neighborhood. Former book critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, his 2020 *Los Angeles Times* article has led to a bill currently before Congress, the 21st-Century Federal Writers' Project Act (H.R. 3054).

OPENING REMARKS

Introducing people and this panel

MODERATOR QUESTIONS

Some talking points

Update on the creative economy– how important it is and how writers are job generators

Update on New Federal Writers Project

- Racial equity among writers means: individuals giving to organizations that serve writers of color; the government and other grantors providing more funds to these underfunded institutions; institutions paying writers for their administration work, writing, teaching, and readings.
- Building coalitions to advocate for workers and arts workers (Poetry Coalition is an example of such a coalition)
 1. Seed/Encourage public/private/philanthropic partnerships that develop and support basic infrastructure for artists and arts organizations. Example: the High/Low in St. Louis, developed by the Kranzberg Arts Foundation is a building that provides (well) below market-rate office, meeting, and performance spaces for literary orgs.
 2. The need for funders (governmental, corporate, philanthropic, etc.) to recognize that literary organizations require start-up capital just as any other business would. A robust arts sector requires funding for infrastructure that ensures long-term stability for the org and a living wage for those who work in arts administration.
 3. Across the literary arts sector, focused attention on professionalizing our cultural workers. (e.g., no more out of focus selfies from Kimbilio's award winners.) Professionalization includes both training as well as support, as needed, to obtain the necessary tools of the trade (professional photography, training in how to present one's work, financial planning, functioning computers and software, etc.)