Event Title: Art Belongs to Everyone: Giving Literature and Art a New Voice

Event Description: The arts should belong to everyone. Lucky Jefferson is excited to present research from ongoing focus groups and the surveying of Black-identifying writers and artists residing in Chicago. With support from Illinois Humanities, this research is a step towards advancing creative communities of color by raising awareness about the harms that continue to exist in publishing. Participants will be able to learn, offer insight(s), and co-partner with us to develop new communities of practice.

Event Category: Discussion Room, Publishing

Event Organizer

NaBeela Washington (she/her): An emerging Black writer, and art collector, NaBeela Washington holds a Master's in Creative Writing and English from Southern New Hampshire University and a Bachelor's in Visual Advertising from The University of Alabama at Birmingham. She is the Founder of Lucky Jefferson.

Event Organizer Moderator

Morgan Christie is the author of "Boolean Logic", the Howling Bird Press Nonfiction Prize winner, "These Bodies" (Tolsun Books, 2020), a Hurston Wright Legacy Award nominee, and four poetry chapbooks. She was awarded the 2022 Arc Poem of the Year prize and Digging Press's Chapbook Series Prize.

Event Participants

Dorian H Nash: Writer, Director, Playwright, and Internet TV Host. A lover of art, connection, and community involvement. Dorian leads the Public Practice department at The Smart Museum of Art. She believes in the transformational power of creativity and art in the lives of everyday people.

Mel Sherrer (she/her): Mel Sherrer (She/Her) received her B.F.A. from Hollins University in Roanoke, VA. and her M.F.A. from Converse University in Spartanburg, SC. Mel is the author of Vice Grip (ABP, 2021) and she has poetry
published in Poet Lore, Zone 3 Press, Storm Cellar, SWWIM, Interim, and others. She currently teaches courses in Performance Literature and Poetry, and serves as the Pop Culture Editor for Sage Cigarettes Magazine. Find her work and more information at www.MelSherrer.com.

NaBeela Washington: An emerging Black writer, and art collector, NaBeela Washington holds a Master’s in Creative Writing and English from Southern New Hampshire University and Bachelor’s in Visual Advertising from The University of Alabama at Birmingham. She is the Founder of Lucky Jefferson.

Opening Moderator Remarks & Housekeeping Announcements

<Thank you all for being here. The first time my colleague, NaBeela Washington, and I spoke, our conversation segued into a dialogue regarding a matter we were both extremely connected to, and affected by. A matter in which we immediately recognized many Black writers and creatives are affected by: the lack of representation in publishing and submission queues. Whether referencing friends, ourselves, or submissions in journals or presses we’d both overseen, this issue of representation and evenly balanced submission portals remains a constant. From that onward, it has been NaBeela and Lucky Jefferson’s mission to identify the forum of the gap, and to assist in closing it.

Lucky Jefferson's research began with support from Illinois Humanities in 2023. We surveyed Black, African, and African-American-identifying writers and artists residing in Chicago's North Side, West Side, and South Side neighborhoods to evaluate better the intricacies of creative experiences and decision-making within the Chicago literary and artistic community.

In late 2023, we expanded our research to Black, African, and African-American-identifying writers and artists located across the United States. Based on insights from focus groups and a survey involving 100+ respondents, our study seeks to unravel the nuanced engagement and considerations guiding the choices of writers and artists as they navigate perpetual harm within publishing and the multifaceted landscape of literary magazines, presses, and publications.

Of the over one hundred respondents, two of them have joined us along with Lucky Jefferson’s founder for a conversation surrounding art, our research
findings, and the necessity for inclusivity, representation, and transparency from the platforms and administrators in the publishing industry.

Welcome to *Art Belongs to Everyone: Giving Literature and Art a New Voice*. A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along with a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, Morgan Christie, know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.

- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.

- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.

- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.

- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of accommodations while at the conference, including chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

**Participant Opening Remarks:**

<Here, I’ll ask you each to introduce yourself, your connection to the literary and arts landscape, and what you are hoping to bring to our discussion today. (Up to 5 mins each.).>

**Dorian H Nash:**
<Hello everyone, I'm Dorian, a Writer, Director, Playwright, and Internet TV Host, with a passion for art, connection, and community involvement. Currently, I lead the Public Practice department at The Smart Museum of Art. For me, art is not just a medium of expression; it's a transformative force that has the power to enrich the lives of everyday people. Today, I'm excited to be part of this panel where we can explore the profound impact of collaborative creativity and its role in fostering inclusive connections within our communities. Thank you for having me.>
Mel Sherrr (she/her):
<My name is Mel Sherrr, I currently live in Las Vegas, NV., but I was raised in rural Virginia. I started writing at a young age and was relentless about my pursuit of poetry, and eventually went on to receive an M.F.A., but I was discouraged at every step by educators, mentors, and family who simply did not believe that creative writing was a viable career for a Black woman. In their opinions, the fine arts were reserved for trust-funded white men as a means for leisure philosophy.

I want to bring a sense of Rusticism to this literary discussion. By that I mean, I want to show Black writers that you can come to writing from homely, humble roots, and that those roots are a rich source of artistic inspiration. I want writers to understand that you can start right where you are regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, age, orientation, gender identity, location, or income limitations.

I hope I can offer myself as an example in this discussion, an example which demonstrates that when it comes to the written arts, passion is possession, and thus art belongs to everyone. >

NaBeela Washington:
<Hello! My name is NaBeela Washington and I am the Founder and Editor-in-Chief at Lucky Jefferson. When I first started Lucky Jefferson, we were not who we are today. We began out of my desire to find community as I had studied communications and art during my undergraduate years. I realized in 2018, that I didn’t know many writers and after deciding to go back to school for English and Creative Writing, I desired a deeper fellowship with writers, wherever they were. In the fall of 2019, our first issue, Testament would literally be a testament of the work we would soon do. From publishing poetry writing colleagues in my program, we quickly grew to publish flash fiction, creative nonfiction, and art. We grew even more by starting a creative arts program for art students looking for real-world experience outside of the classroom (something I struggled with during my undergraduate years) and launching unique community-based anthologies to highlight often overlooked neighborhoods. Now, we are conducting arts research to uncover and illuminate varying disparities in our field, with the support of different funders. After our conversation today, I hope that you realize that while there have been great changes throughout the industry, harm still very much exists and there are voices that are still being silenced and ignored and tokenized. There are stories that still need to be told and there are human beings who need representation to be the change they so desperately need in their world.>
Moderator Questions:

1. Did you have to make personal sacrifices to be here today?

2. What inspired Lucky Jefferson to initiate research on Black-identifying writers and artists in Chicago?

3. Could you provide an overview of the ongoing focus groups and survey process conducted with Black-identifying writers and artists?

4. In what ways does this research contribute to the advancement of creative communities of color, particularly in the context of publishing? Can you share early findings or insights uncovered through the focus groups and surveys so far?

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Audience Q&A Session
<Up to 5 mins>

- How does your publication or press address systemic issues and bring about positive change in the publishing landscape for communities of color?

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5. What was it like participating in this research initiative? What were your motivations for participating in the focus group conducted by Lucky Jefferson?

6. What specific harms in the publishing industry have you experienced and why are these issues particularly important to address?

7. From your viewpoint, what are some potential strategies or initiatives that could be implemented to foster new communities of practice, as mentioned in the event description?

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Audience Q&A Session

<Up to 5 mins>

● What harms have you noticed in your work? How do they impact the work being published or art being produced?

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8. As a playwright and performing artist, could you share some of your personal experiences navigating the publishing landscape, especially concerning challenges faced by communities of color?

9. Have you observed or personally encountered any specific barriers or opportunities within the publishing industry that you believe are crucial to highlight?

10. Given your experiences, do you see any recurring themes or patterns within the publishing industry that warrant attention and consideration for positive change?

11. What steps or actions can individuals take to support the mission of advancing creative communities of color in the realm of publishing?

Audience Q&A Session

<Up to 5 mins or remaining time>

● Were there any notable research-driven insights or findings presented during the event that stood out to you? If so, what were they?

● How do you envision translating the research knowledge gained from this discussion into actionable strategies or interventions within the creative communities of color in your community?