

SUMMER 2018

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# THE DORNSIFE CENTER CONNECTOR

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## TRIPOD



## PEOPLE

## PLACES

## PORTRAITS

## DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Dear friends and neighbors,

At the Dornsife Center we are immensely proud of Writers Room, a program that sums up so well our ambitions of creative collaboration.

In this issue we feature Tripod, a Writers Room project made possible by the generous support of Canon Solutions America. During the 2017-2018 academic year, six groups of three writers—drawn from the community, Drexel, and local high schools—worked together to create original projects that combined writing and photography. These triads documented West Philadelphia and other parts of the city to tell collaborative stories about their neighborhoods.

In this issue we present a piece that combines the writing and photography of the Tripod participants. "Reality Is That You Are" was originally curated by Kirsten Kashock, Writers Room Faculty Director and Assistant Teaching Professor in the Department of English and Philosophy, for a reading at the Free Library of Philadelphia to kick off the opening of the Tripod photography exhibit at the library.

The show will be on display in the library's Parkway Central Branch Art and Literature department through September 15, 2018 and we hope you will get a chance to visit the library to see it for yourself.

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## PARTNER PROFILE

<i>Name:</i>	Lauren Lowe
<i>Job:</i>	I'm a Writers Room alum (Drexel BA English '17) and this past year I was an ArtistYear fellow teaching creative writing at Paul Robeson High School in West Philly
<i>Hometown:</i>	Lumberton, New Jersey
<i>Current Residence:</i>	Philadelphia's Chinatown Neighborhood
<i>Favorite books:</i>	Muriel Barbery's <i>The Elegance of the Hedgehog</i> and Joan Didion's <i>Slouching Towards Bethlehem</i>
<i>Favorite food:</i>	Dumplings
<i>Favorite spot on the Drexel campus:</i>	Writers Room Studio

### *What is your role at the Dornsife Center?*

I've been a member of Writers Room since I was a sophomore at Drexel. Going to the monthly First Tuesday workshops at Dornsife was one of my favorite aspects of my college experience, and the work I did there became the cornerstone of my education. As an alum, I've stayed involved as an ArtistYear teaching fellow, bringing my own high school students to Dornsife and Writers Room as they participated in the Tripod project throughout the year.

### *Where can we find you at the Dornsife Center?*

Probably in the Learning Terrace of the Lindy House.

### *What is your favorite thing about the Dornsife Center?*

The people. The diverse group of people I've met at Dornsife have become important, enduring presences in my life. Listening and sharing our stories together is transformative—it's something I'm very grateful to experience regularly.

### *What do you do when you're not at the Dornsife Center?*

Live—I mean—work at the Writers Room studio. Go for hikes with my partner and my dog. Go out for runs (sometimes).

# REALITY IS THAT YOU ARE

**Amir Curry**

**What I See**

The curtains were sheer and the city could be viewed through them, through the gap. It appeared to be late in the night, the lights from nearby buildings illuminating the darkness.

In the beginning I was nervous, I felt directionless and out of my element when I initially encountered the cameras. But as I began to take pictures, I realized the most important part of capturing a photo is recognizing the nuances. I'm passionate about exposing details. But I'm even more passionate about highlighting and exposing details that would be overlooked.

Dilapidation

Dreams decay and fade away

But light still shines



**Victoria Huggins-Peurifoy**

**I see shadow**

Once again, I find myself alone, in the dark, in a corner, with shadows all around me. On stage, I'm preparing to go be a part of an act that folks are growing tired of hearing. This space holds the coldness outside, within these bricks that surround me. This rail, that rail, I wish would lead to a better place... So I could be folded and taken to brightness.

Darkness with a spot  
Of Hope gives a feeling of  
Rescue and mercy

Windows of the mind,  
Imagine mirrors instead.



**Mark Dawkins**

**I see yellow**

Nothing is groundbreaking in my neighborhood, nothing but the ground breaking. Cracked streets and sidewalks are concealed by yellow tape. Cracked skulls on sidewalks, escalated due to the streets, concealed by yellow tape. Some things might never get fixed.

Why does this stop us? Why does this stop us if the person we care about is lying on the ground, if the streets and buildings we love are injured? Because the tape reads do not enter? Somebody has to do something, or maybe something is too much.

From the outside looking in you see what everyone else sees: a community, houses that stand in a row with little difference on the exterior, a school that stands sturdy but has its bruises. And a park that tells a story, a story from the inside.





**Rosalyn Cliett**  
**I see how it used to be**

In the past, most of us didn't even lock our doors, and if we left our bikes or any other possessions outside overnight, they were there the next morning untouched. The houses on my block had porches, and everybody had porch furniture, a lounge chair, a glider which was a three-seater that you could swing back and forth, an armchair. So on those nice summer nights I would lay outside on the glider enjoying the summer breeze looking at the stars in the sky... Oh yea, we use to have a sky full of stars. And I would try and count them, and watch them as I talked to God. I didn't know him that well at the time, but we kept company until I'd fall asleep and would find myself waking up the next morning on the porch.

**Alicia DeSimone**  
**I feel it now**

Philadelphia—heavy  
in my mouth  
and someone tells me I've bitten off more  
than I can chew.  
But I always keep chewing.  
I am stuffed  
and swollen with love.

My tongue sits thick in my mouth  
with the weight of "home."  
It's sticky and bitter and new.  
Home sweet home.

**Kaliyah Pitts**  
**As I look at this picture I see**

a young lady ready for anything—  
she seems like she got everything figured out, she  
knows what she wants to be in life, she knows how to  
make it happen, and she's ready to take that one extra  
step to make it all happen. Although this is what I see in  
the picture, this is not actually true.

Yes I'm from Philly, West Philly to be exact. A place where  
almost everybody smokes or sells drugs but I'm not just  
from there. I came from generations and generations of  
strong black women who never gave up in what they  
believe in.



We will always keep  
moving and making.  
Loving and leaving.  
The holes left behind  
Let in the light—

Once the world was flat

In the distance  
sunrise bathes in lavender.  
That sad bliss on the horizon  
and everything beyond it  
makes me feel small.

The sun spills herself along  
my skin. She doesn't care  
who sees her. I think  
that is brilliant.

**Dahmere Town**  
**What I see—**

An endless rabbit hole that some people just can't climb out. With only very few escapes to be shown through decrepit cracks of light. Some fall so far that they can never return which divides people between race, class, wealth, status. And all to reach the top where they believe the light is, but it's there, because from the beginning it was nothing more than a delusion.

**What I hear—**

Occasional cars driving by and familiar, yet unfamiliar voices. I don't hear the creaks and cracks anymore. But I can still hear my past.



**Sarah Wagner-Bloom**  
**I taste the past**

My mom and I used to go to a Farmer's market that was set up on the perimeter of a small park. There, my mom bought chicken eggs the color of sea glass, kale before it was cool, and sunset-dipped Swiss chard.

I grew up between two worlds: my father's Jewish family, and my mother's Lutheran family. The only disappointing meals I have eaten in my life have been during the holidays... I wasn't Jewish enough for Jewish people and I wasn't Christian when I'm in a group of Christians. My favorite part of any holiday is eating just with my parents...the three of us are able to be ourselves and do things our own way. It was always clear to me that food and our way of eating was our religion; more important than Saints or Maccabees.



**Patricia Burton**  
**What I know**

Philadelphia has always been like "A Tale of Two Cities." The seen and the unseen. The part that's displayed to the world, and the part that's hidden. Like looking through a kaleidoscope, the images are portrayed and interpolated according to how we control and manipulate the apparatus, through race, culture, economics and law.

Memory is part of the patchwork that shapes, molds, and creates who you are now and are capable of becoming... If love is the foundation, then memory is the glue that sustains generations of connections; all stitched together to create elaborate patterns, designs, and even more connections.

And memory is always there waiting. It could surface as innocuously as a smell or taste that could evoke memories that seem a whole lifetime away.



**Brenda Bailey**  
**I remember my street**

I loved living on Ludwick Street. It was not the suburbs, but I had a giant backyard. This is where I first felt grass under my feet and fell in love with the fresh cut smell of it. Whenever I ride through the parks and smell it I remember laying in the grass, watching my mother hang clothes on an umbrella clothesline, watching the caretaker remove the garbage and put it out for trash day. I hear the greetings from the neighbors passing by, and those hanging out their own clothes. I see my mother smiling and the sun shining on her face.

People spoke as they passed by in that time. We played double-dutch with clothesline rope, shot dead man's bluff with bottle caps. My favorite was wall ball. I could really slam that ball.



**Jasmine James**  
**And I remember her street**

She wanted a picture by the bus stop. We moved towards 32nd St. and she began getting into character, breaking out into short jogs back and forth as she pretended to be chasing after a bus. I asked her to stand still for a moment and took a photo. I was moved; unhinged at how movie-like it appeared to be. A still from film about the 60's in Philly. I wanted to write that film just from what she'd told me about Ludwick St. and her childhood; I could already hear the cacophony of children's voices mimicking the anecdote Brenda shared. She used to sing some song and get paired up with another young soul, destined to be soulmates. "We were fresh," she said.

**Kayla Watson**  
**I remember just yesterday**

It was spring break and I met this girl full of wonder, Thursday afternoon after being hit on by a couple dudes \*shivers\*

Different was she,  
I fought her best friend and she still vibes with me.  
Something about her set me on fire,  
I don't know what it was,  
Maybe the way she walked,  
The way she talked,  
Or was it was the way you can tell she's in her own world

Somebody dared me to kiss her,  
Looking at her I saw a light blush creep up on her cheek;  
not too visible,  
Unless you just focus on her,  
Asking wasn't an option,  
Especially while standing on a shuttle bus full of passengers,  
Soft and tender she was,  
And that was that.

She was my spring and I was her break.



**Norman Cain**  
**I remember things my mother said to me**

Once, when I was a teenager, she looked me in the eyes and said, “I know what your problem is—girls.” And she was correct.

When I left my parents’ home on the morning of July 5, 1965 to report to the army, she urged me to hold my head up, and a year and a half later when I came home on leave, she touched me and said with a tone of relief in her voice, “You came Home.”

When I told her about a dream I had about her father, mother, and uncle—she said that they were urging me to keep the faith. During a period in my life when nothing was going right and I was making wrong decisions my mother would constantly tell me to not discard my gifts.

If one did a wonderful deed my mother would not necessarily congratulate them, as she felt that they were doing what was expected of them. My mother also told me to be careful around police, because they will not hesitate to kill you.



**Devin Welsh**  
**I remember my Mom-mom’s voice**

I had been talking with Aunt Leslie about missing her voice right around the time the ALS took it from her - from us - indefinitely. While that never stopped her from telling us she loved us with three pats on the heart, and eventually just a nod of the head, I was terrified that I’d someday forget what her voice sounded like.

I’m still torn up that I’d taken something so precious for granted when I thought I had so many more years with her. But that was when Aunt Leslie told me about a few books she had recorded for Ji’Mia, and that I could borrow them. She gave them to me shortly after my grandmother passed, and I couldn’t wait to hear her voice again. When I opened “Goodnight Moon” and her voice started playing - Mom-mom’s reading voice - I lost it.



**Natasha Hajo**  
**I remember that everything changes**

We reach Wallie’s corner store and I laugh, thinking about the fluctuating prices of groceries inside—nothing in this city is static. Soon we pass Brandywine, Haverford, and stop on Mount Vernon. I’ve memorized the name of the streets but I can never pinpoint where they are in relation to one another. We stop at a playground with a jungle gym made up of yellows, blues, and reds. Somehow the colors still don’t stand out, even with the bleached sky as the backdrop. We stand on the outside of the fence looking in on the desolate playground for a few silent moments. I hear, for what feels like the first time, the steady rhythm of the city. I hum along to a song that wasn’t written for me.





**Jordan McCullough**  
I can see change.

It looks like an abandoned building, the same one we pass by every once in awhile and it's still abandoned. It's a brick building covered in red and blue paint which makes purple by the way. The door is gone and replaced by plastic wrap so people can easily see through it, with coffee spilled on the sidewalk, which doesn't even look too close to being finished. Next to it is probably a new building, a gated community perhaps where the sign says for rent. I'm sure people are living in it by now. Someone's water is standing by the gate, half full. What's above is either a security camera or a light switch. Either way it looks like bug eyes.

**Kyle Howey**  
Years ago, I would have told you

that I was comfortable here. Alone with my own thoughts. Worries, more often. But now I'm terrified of stillness. Surrounded by fears, I never realized where I was amidst the worst of them. Knee deep in a sewer, drenched in a bad parody of living. It felt safe. Riskless. Familiar. Wretchedly subsumed. Wombed. Unendangered, but all the more dangerously still. Fetal. Slumbering. Always waiting to be born.

There's special meaning in the uncommonness of things. I have to remind myself to take them more holistically. It can be marvelous. Recognizing color in histories that can't be taught. But we can always use more color, under this shared ceiling of blue.



**Carol Richardson McCullough**  
I see new things every day

FOR RENT/FOR SALE signs  
Pop up in spring like flowers  
In my neighborhood

A neighborhood's face  
Begins to change once others  
Assess its value

Photography offers a way of viewing a world that is constantly changing while preserving a slice of it, pressed within the pages of time. It offers a chance to glimpse what is and what has come before, taking me out of my confines and transporting me into another space. Walking along the street, passing the familiar, I stop now, and look through my lens to get a sharper view of the small detail against the broad backdrop. In this way I partake of the infinite and connect with the Divine.

Look up and you might see Love standing right in front of you on these city streets, looking quite different than you'd ever imagined.



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