

**SPONSORED BY THE WOMEN AND THEATRE PROGRAM & THE ASSOCIATION
OF THEATRE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

2024 JANE CHAMBERS AWARD FOR PLAYWRITING

MAIN CONTEST WINNER FOR 2024

***shadow/land* (Cast size: 3) by Erika Dickerson-Despenza.** This bold eco-feminist drama is a raw and haunting excavation of the past set against the backdrop of one of the nation's deadliest disasters. It's August 29, 2005 in New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina lunges toward the City. Ruth coaxes her mother, Magalee, to sell Shadowland, the family business and New Orleans' first air-conditioned hotel for Black people. But as Hurricane Katrina begins her ruin, tensions between duty and desire surface, a levee is brought to its knees, and Ruth must wrestle with all that she's ready to let go. An incisive exploration of a complex mother-daughter relationship, *shadow/land* reframes and redresses a tragedy in American history from the perspective of those who suffered the most but who were heard from the least. The world of the play is masterfully constructed, melding the specificity of New Orleans Afro-Creole culture with the ethereal aura of magical realism in an effort to remind us that racism and generational trauma cannot be washed away in receding floodwaters.

This play is the first installment of Dickerson-Despenza's 10-play Katrina Cycle. Taking up epic space, these plays traverse the Katrina diaspora in an examination of the ongoing effects of displacement rippling in and beyond New Orleans. Together, the ten works underscore (neo)colonialism, environmental racism, and the erasure of Black land legacies through the distress of disaster, evacuation, displacement, and urban renewal.



Erika Dickerson-Despenza is a Black radical leftist writer, cultural organizer, cultural memory worker, land steward, and farmer. She is the creator and inaugural resident of The Ntozake Shange Social Justice Playwriting Residency at The Public Theater in partnership with Barnard College and the Shange Trust. Erika is the independent steward of The Daughters Table, a 14-acre regenerative organic farm and herbiary on Bayou Petite Passe rooted in a radical ecowomanist praxis. She is also the Producing Artistic Director of the Alice Dunbar-Nelson & Shirley Graham Du Bois Going to the River Festival. Awards: PEN/Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater Award (2023), The Antonyo's Lorraine Hansberry Kinfolk Award (2023), Edgerton Foundation New Play Award (2022, 2019), Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (2021), Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award (2020), Thom Thomas Award (2020), Lilly Award (2020), Barrie and Bernice Stavis Award (2020), Grist 50 Fixer (2020), Princess Grace Playwriting Award (2019). Residencies & Fellowships: Tow Playwright-in-Residence at The Public Theater (2019-2020), U.S. Water Alliance National Arts & Culture Delegate (2019), New York Stage and Film Fellow-in-Residence (2019), New Harmony Project Writer-in Residence (2019), Dramatists Guild Foundation Fellow (2018-2019), The Lark Van Lier New Voices Fellow (2018). Productions: *shadow/land* (The Public Theater, 2023), *cullud wattah* (The Public Theater, 2021).

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RUNNERS UP

***Beautiful Blessed Child* (Cast size: 2) by Daria Miyeko Marinelli.** This poignant and pointed parent-child road trip play takes a familiar genre and makes it fresh, modern, and, at times, startling. Aimiko has never taken a road trip with t/her Mom. Sharon has never seen nor heard of any sort of mother-daughterchild road trip. And so, our brave pioneers take to the road, driving West, 10 miles per hour above the speed limit, with tales of cannibals (The Donner Party), crane wives (The Decemberists), and samurai children (the mythic family lore) buzzing over the airwaves, offering avenues of survival, all of which are only moderately helpful when Aimiko's car radiator suddenly goes dead. Weaving influences of Butoh and shadow puppetry together with the complications of family dynamics, *Beautiful Blessed Child* is a wildly theatrical yet nuanced exploration of identity, sacrifice, and transformation.



Daria Miyeko Marinelli (they/she) is a playwright, screenwriter, and climate storyteller obsessed with climate heists, the Usonian West, and bifurcating narratives. Daria's work has been performed at La Jolla Playhouse's WOW Festival, Atlantic Theatre Company, Ensemble Studio Theatre, among others. Marinelli has developed work with Cirque du Soleil, Roundabout Theatre Company, The Playwright's Realm, Fault Line Theatre, The New Harmony Project, and The Kennedy Center. Marinelli is developing a TV series with Hill District Media and their original pilot (*We are Your Villain*) was a Finalist for The Black List's NRDC Climate Storytelling Fellowship. BA: Brown University. MFA: University of Texas at Austin.

***The Words of Ants* (Cast Size: 5) by Xiaoyan Kang.** Crafted with intricate simplicity, this deeply moving play follows a linguistics professor who pays an uninvited visit to the sole remaining speaker of a secret language shared only by women in a traditionally patriarchal society. As the last natural inheritor, Y embarks upon a journey to preserve an almost extinct language, but at what cost? Celebration of Y and her language soon turns to widespread commodification, as Kang interrogates the ways in which female cultures and legacies are often either completely erased or commercially exploited. Situated at the intersections of poverty, spirituality, and feminism in the face of an evolving China, *The Words of Ants* deftly explores the bonds and the distances between women of separate generations and drastically different lived experiences.



Born and raised in China, **Xiaoyan Kang** developed a strong interest in playwriting while studying under Philip Kan Gotanda at Berkeley. As a playwright, she is intrigued by the performativity in everyday life and how we are constantly subject to and adjusting to others' gaze and interpretation. She has been an O'Neil Semifinalist, BBC International Radio Playwriting Competition Regional Winner and KCACTF Region 5 Paul Stephen Lim Playwriting Award Recipient. Some of her short plays have been developed at 24 Hour Plays: Nationals and KCACTF (Region 5). Xiaoyan is currently an MFA candidate at the Iowa Playwrights Workshop.

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HONORABLE MENTIONS

Amma's Wit (Cast Size: 5) by **Sandra A. Daley-Sharif** is an elegant, impeccably detailed narrative that celebrates the deeply valuable but often ignored work of Granny midwives. At the turn of the twentieth century, these courageous Black women in the South defied patriarchal white medical institutions in creating an entire network of female-centered healthcare to support underserved communities. Granny midwives considered this work a privilege and a spiritual calling as they provided necessary care to rural women during pregnancy and labor at a time when hospitals were not accessible to them. Based on historical records and biographies, the play weaves previously untold tales of the midwives' work with rich music, movement, and media. The urgency of this story leaps off the page as we continue to face a shameful mortality rate for pregnant Black women in the United States, but it is Daley-Sharif's care and reverence for the Granny midwives that makes this history reverberate in a way that cannot be denied.



Sandra A. Daley-Sharif is an award-winning Afro-Caribbean writer for theater and TV and a Professor of Dramatic Writing at SCAD University in Savannah, Georgia. An OBIE Award winner and Josephine Abady Award recipient, her plays have been recognized by the Kilroys List and as finalists for prestigious awards. Sandra's work, including *Chiseled Legacies* and *The Trial of Amos 'n' Andy*, explores African American history and contemporary issues. A sought-after dramaturg and collaborative deviser, she has worked with renowned playwrights and composers. Her plays have been produced and developed by various theaters and festivals, consistently receiving critical acclaim for their sharp writing and compelling storytelling.

Traces of Desire (Cast Size: 6) by **Lina Patel**. This funny, philosophical, and smartly written feminist epic asks a compelling question: Can desire be inherited? Once upon a time in Bombay, a widowed Uma Bhatt refused a suitor. He was Muslim; she was Hindu. Unwilling to risk her reputation, she suppressed her desire. Shortly after, Uma died. What might be the end of a tragic love story is, in fact, the spark that lights up this choral play chronicling the struggles and pleasures of female sexuality in one Indian family. Over three generations, a few shenanigans and migrations, these women learn to embrace their bodies and yearnings, freeing themselves—and a fourth generation—of long-held notions of womanhood. *Traces of Desire* is beautiful, full-bodied exploration of what it means to be a daughter, wife, mother, and widow, and how desire shapes the way women move through those roles during their lifetime.



Lina Patel is a multi-disciplinary artist whose work explores disability, non-traditional relationships, and power in an unstable world. Upcoming work: *Sick Girl or, Don't Hate Me Cuz I'm Pretty* at PlayFest Indy/New Harmony Project; her UCLA/Playwright's Arena commissioned new play, *Traces of Desire*, is being published by Bloomsbury, U.K. Recently, Lina was invited to develop her plays at The Lark Playwright's Workshop at 2nd Stage in New York and at Rogue Machine Theater's inaugural Playwright's Roundtable in West Hollywood. On television, Lina was co-producer on Ava DuVernay's nuanced series, *Cherish the Day*, exploring Black love; previously,

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DC's character-driven sci-fi drama *Krypton*. Currently, she is developing her original pilot about mental health and law enforcement for BET Plus. Lina got her start as an actor and voice-over artist. Along with her work, Lina is a Lecturer of Theater at Pomona College, where she teaches Playwriting.

***Rough Trade* (Cast Size: 1) by Katie Pollock.** Part takedown of capitalism, part wannabe dancing dildo musical, this one-woman play is a celebration of resilience, humor... and sex toys! Through an intricate web of objects and a drive for community and connection, the members of a Facebook barter group are giving the giant middle finger to capitalism, with trades that are funny, sexy, strange and touching. A thrilling (and terrifying) examination of the ways capitalism and the patriarchy fail us, and the precarious position all women risk finding themselves in, *Rough Trade* is a feminist story of hope in challenging times.

Katie Pollock is an award-winning playwright and writer for screen. Plays for theatre are: *Human Activity*, *Rough Trade* (a solo show which I also performed), *Normal*, *The Becoming*, *The Hansard Monologues (Age of Entitlement)*, *Blue Italian/Nil by Sea*, *The Hansard Monologues (A Matter of Public Importance)*, *The Blue Angel Hotel*, *A Quiet Night In Rangoon*, *A Girl Called Red*, and numerous short works, including as part of *The Curve*, produced by Critical Stages and available to watch in their screening room. Her works for radio are: *Beetroot: a bloody journey through roots and belonging*, *Nil by Sea*, *Contact*, *O is for Oxygen* and *Blue Italian*. Katie also works as a dramaturg, senior editor and producer and is a co-director of The Wallace Co-op theatre collective. *Rough Trade*, *Normal* and *The Curve* are published by Currency Press. Other plays are available at [Australian Plays Transform](#).

—Notes by Megan Stahl (Associate Coordinator of Award/ Boston Conservatory at Berklee)

THE JANE CHAMBERS AWARD, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary, recognizes plays & performance texts by women writers that present feminist perspectives & significant roles for female and genderqueer performers. This annual award, established in 1984, is given in memory of lesbian playwright Jane Chambers who, through her plays *A LATE SNOW*, *LAST SUMMER AT BLUEFISH COVE*, *MY BLUE HEAVEN*, *KUDZU*, & *THE QUINTESSENTIAL IMAGE*, became a major feminist voice in American theatre. We understand feminism to refract across diversity, welcome experimentation in theme and form, and often honor works that stage under-represented lives. Sponsored by the Women and Theatre Program (WTP) with the Association for Theater in Higher Education, the Jane Chambers winner receives \$1000, a concert reading or creative focus for the winning play at ATHE, and one year's membership with WTP. Guidelines for submission—and our archive of recent winners—can be viewed at < www.womenandtheatreprogram.com >. This year's winning play *shadow/land* by Erika Dickerson-Dispenza rose from more than 450 submissions, across three rounds of adjudication involving over 35 feminist critics,

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theater artists and educators. Honored plays suit varied theatre missions and feminist perspectives.

Please help to spread good buzz for Plays that present feminist excellence. Teach them, stage them, and help to reshape the repertory—and world. As we celebrate our 40th anniversary for the Prize, we are considering a pause. Please look for our two anthologies curating recent winners:.

Lesbian & Queer Plays from the Jane Chambers Prize —features winning plays, with interviews, by M. Casey (*Unspeakable Acts*), C. Chafee (*Full/Self*), M. Cohn (*The Siegels of Montauk*), MJ Kaufman (*Unspeakable Acts*), and G.Young (*Femmes: A Tragedy*). Edited by Maya E Roth and Jen-Scott Mobley with Preface by Jill Dolan and Afterword by Sara Warner. (2018) Published by NoPassport Press. Available from NOPE and Amazon.

Forthcoming! *Cross-Cultural Plays from the Jane Chambers Prize*—features winning plays, with interviews, by C. Evans (*Trojan Barbie: A Car Crash Encounter with Euripides' 'Trojan Women'*), N. Goodnow (*Mud Offerings*), L. Loomer (*ROE—revised*), J. Silverman (*STILL*) and E. Stanton (*No Candy!*). Edited by Maya E Roth and Jen-Scott Mobley with Preface and Afterword by Quiara Alegría Hudes. Forthcoming from NoPassport Press in early 2025.