

## **MEDIA CONTACT**

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### **The Hermitage Artist Retreat Playwright Aleshea Harris Celebrated at Hermitage Greenfield Prize Award Dinner on April 11**

*More than 130 guests gathered during a socially-distanced evening to celebrate the winner of the 2021 Hermitage Greenfield Prize at Michael's On East in Sarasota. The evening of entertainment included a welcome video from Tamara Tunie and Black Theatre United; a tribute featuring past Hermitage Greenfield Prize recipients, jurors, and partners; performances of Harris' work, and a stirring musical closing by Ann Morrison and Joseph Holt.*

(April 14, 2021) More than 130 guests gathered to celebrate playwright Aleshea Harris, the winner of the 2021 Hermitage Greenfield Prize, on Sunday, April 11, at the annual Prize Dinner at Michael's On East in Sarasota. The event had been moved earlier that day from its original outdoor setting at The Ringling's Ca' d'Zan due to inclement weather. The festive evening was chaired by Ellen Berman and Flora Major. Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and CEO of the Hermitage, served as master of ceremonies.

“Neither rain nor sleet nor any tropical storm was going to stop us from finding a way to celebrate Aleshea Harris as the winner of this year's Hermitage Greenfield

Prize!” noted Sandberg in true show-must-go-on fashion. “While the change of venue was an unexpected surprise, we were determined to forge ahead with this very special evening of entertainment and celebration. We thank everyone at The Ringling Museum and Michael’s On East for their shared commitment to the safety and comfort of our guests. The adoration, respect, and joy in honor of Aleshea were truly palpable, and we are so grateful to the Greenfield Foundation and all of our sponsors for their generous support.”

“The evening was full of irrepressible energy and talent,” added co-chairs Ellen Berman and Flora Major. “Aleshea Harris is a powerful presence, and the crowd was alive with enthusiasm. The whole event was a seamless and stunning success, and the Hermitage Greenfield Prize Dinner has been transformed into one of the most entertaining evenings in town, capturing the true spirit of diversity and talent of the Hermitage and its artists.”

The festive evening commenced with a welcome video from Black Theatre United, featuring the music video “Stand for Change,” with a personal message of welcome and words of congrats to Harris from acclaimed actor and producer Tamara Tunie (*Law & Order: Special Victims Unit; As the World Turns*) on behalf of her fellow BTU co-founders: six-time Tony Award-winner Audra McDonald, Billy Porter, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Wendell Pierce, and more. The evening also showcased a tribute video featuring brand-new footage from thirteen years of Hermitage Greenfield Prize recipients, jurors, and presenting partners. Excerpts from Harris’ work *On Sugarland* were brought to life on stage by Ive Lyles (Westcoast Black Theater Troupe) and Imani Williams (Asolo Conservatory). Following the presentation of the award to Ms. Harris,

Sandberg introduced a stirring rendition of Stephen Sondheim's "I'm Still Here," performed by Broadway and Sarasota's own Ann Morrison and accompanied by Joseph Holt on piano to conclude the celebration. "How fitting the metaphor of Sondheim's lyrics – especially after this year!" exclaimed Morrison.

This year's HGP events, which occurred April 8-12, included a first look at the prize-commissioned work by 2019 winner Helga Davis; a panel discussion with this year's Hermitage Greenfield Prize jurors, Mandy Greenfield<sup>1</sup>, Nataki Garrett, and Robert O'Hara; an artist talk with Aleshea Harris; a Virtual Celebration that was broadcast simultaneously with the live Prize Dinner; and a 'sneak peek' of excerpts from the Prize-commissioned new play by 2018 HGP winner Martyna Majok, performed by Tony Award-nominee Marin Ireland (*Sneaky Pete; The Umbrella Academy*). The Prize is presented in partnership with the Philadelphia-based Greenfield Foundation. The Community Foundation of Sarasota County served as the lead sponsor for this year's festivities.

The Hermitage Greenfield Prize rotates annually between theater, music, and visual art, includes a Hermitage residency and a \$30,000 commission to create new work. Past recipients have included Jennifer Packer (2020, Visual Art), Helga Davis (2019, Music), Martyna Majok (2018, Theater), David Burnett (2017, Photography), Coco Fusco (2016, Visual Art), Bobby Previte (2015, Music), Nilo Cruz (2014, Theater), Trenton Doyle Hancock (2013, Visual Art), Vijay Iyer (2012, Music), John Guare (2011, Theater), Sanford Biggers (2010, Visual Art), Craig Lucas (2009, Theater), and Eve Beglarian (2009, Music).

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<sup>1</sup> Coincidence of name; no relation to Greenfield Foundation

Harris' play, *Is God Is*, won the 2016 Relentless Award. She also received an OBIE Award for playwriting in 2017, the Helen Merrill Playwriting Award in 2019, was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and made The Kilroys' List of "the most recommended un and underproduced plays by trans and female authors of color" for 2017. *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* (directed by Whitney White, produced by The Movement Theatre Company), a play-pageant-ritual response to anti-Blackness, had its critically-acclaimed NYC premiere in 2018, was featured in the April 2019 issue of *American Theatre Magazine* and was nominated for a Drama Desk award. Harris was awarded the Windham-Campbell Literary Prize and the Steinberg Playwriting Award in 2020. She has performed her own work at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Orlando Fringe Festival, REDCAT, as part of La Fête du Livre at La Comédie de Saint-Étienne, and at the Skirball Center in Los Angeles. She is a two- time MacDowell Fellow and has enjoyed residencies at Hedgebrook and Djerassi and is now a Hermitage Fellow.



THE HERMITAGE  
GREENFIELD PRIZE

**About the Hermitage Greenfield Prize:**

The Hermitage Greenfield Prize is a groundbreaking partnership between the Hermitage Artist Retreat and the Greenfield Foundation. Rotating between the fields of music, theater, and visual art, this prestigious national prize seeks to bring into the world works of art that will have a significant impact on the broad as well as our artistic culture. The Hermitage Greenfield Prize is awarded annually and includes a Hermitage Fellowship, as well as a \$30,000 commission for a new piece of work to be created within a two-year time frame. A residency at the Hermitage Artist Retreat on Manasota Key (Sarasota County, Florida), ensures time and space in which to

conceive and complete the work. Winners include **Aleshea Harris**, Theater (2021); **Jennifer Packer**, Visual Art (2020); **Helga Davis**, Music (2019); **Martyna Majok**, Theater (2018); **David Burnett**, Photography (2017); **Coco Fusco**, Visual Art (2016); **Bobby Previte**, Music (2015); **Nilo Cruz**, Theater (2014); **Trenton Doyle Hancock**, Visual Art (2013); **Vijay Iyer**, Music (2012); **John Guare**, Theater (2011); **Sanford Biggers**, Visual Art (2010); **Craig Lucas**, Theater (2009) and **Eve Beglarian**, Music (2009).

### **About the Hermitage Artist Retreat:**

The Hermitage is a nonprofit artist retreat located in Manasota Key, Florida, inviting accomplished artists across multiple disciplines for residencies on its beachfront campus, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Hermitage artists are invited to interact with the local community, reaching thousands of Gulf Coast residents and visitors each year with unique and inspiring programs. Hermitage Fellows have included twelve Pulitzer Prize winners, along with multiple Tony, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and MacArthur Fellowship award winners. Works created at this beachside retreat by a diverse group of Hermitage alumni have gone on to renowned theaters, concert halls, and galleries throughout the world. Each year, the Hermitage awards the \$30,000 Hermitage Greenfield Prize for a new work of art, and the Aspen Music Festival awards the annual Hermitage Prize in Composition. For more information about The Hermitage Artist Retreat, visit [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org).

### **The Hermitage is supported by:**

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