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**The Hermitage Artist Retreat  
Announces  
Theater Maker and Director  
Shariffa Ali  
as the 2022 Recipient of the \$35,000  
Hermitage Major Theater Award**

*The Hermitage Major Theater Award (HMTA) recognizes a playwright or theater artist with a commission of \$35,000 to create an original work, in addition to providing a residency at the Hermitage and an inaugural workshop of the newly created play, anticipated for the fall of 2023 in Chicago, New York, or London.*

*The distinguished Award Committee for this second HMTA included two-time Pulitzer Prize Winner **Lynn Nottage**, Tony and Grammy Award Winner **David Henry Hwang**, and Golden Globe Award Winner **Regina Taylor**.*

**“The Hermitage Major Theater Award is a change maker.”**

*—Regina Taylor, 2022 Hermitage Major Theater Award Committee*

**“In a theatrical landscape hobbled by COVID, the Hermitage has done something heroic; they have instituted a brand new, financially generous commission for a theater artist of demonstrable achievement to draft a new work. It is one of the premier commissions of its kind and could not come at a more auspicious, even urgent time.”**

*—Doug Wright, Hermitage Fellow and 2021 Hermitage Major Theater Award Committee*

**“This award will alter the course of my life; it is a true game changer.”**

*—Shariffa Ali, 2022 Hermitage Major Theater Award Winner*

(May 26, 2022) Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and CEO of the Hermitage Artist Retreat, announced today that accomplished theater artist and director **Shariffa Ali** has been selected as the 2022 recipient of the **Hermitage Major Theater Award (HMTA)**. This national jury-selected prize, newly established by the Hermitage last year with generous support from the Kutya Major Foundation, offers one of the largest non-profit

theater commissions in the country. Ali will receive a cash prize of \$35,000, as well as a residency at the Hermitage (Sarasota County, Florida) and a developmental workshop in a major arts capital such as New York, Chicago, or London in the fall of 2023. Ali's past theatrical productions as a director include *Eclipsed*, *Detroit '67*, *Intimate Apparel*, *We Are Proud to Present*, and the original musical *We Were Everywhere*. She has worked as an arts administrator at The Public Theater and The New Group, and she has taught at New York University, Brooklyn College, Yale University, and Princeton University. She is the second recipient of the HMTA, which was first awarded in 2021 to playwright and filmmaker Radha Blank.

"It is surreal and the most gratifying and pleasant surprise to be honored in this way by artists whose work has been a compass in my own upbringing as a theater maker," said **Shariffa Ali** on receiving the Hermitage Major Theater Award. "The fact that they support my art and wish to carve out space for myself and my collaborator Vuyo Sotashe with this project is a huge honor. It is extremely surprising, humbling, and life-affirming. This award will alter the course of my life; it is a true game changer."

The Hermitage Major Theater Award (HMTA) was established in 2021 to recognize a playwright or theater artist with a \$35,000 commission to create a new, original, and impactful piece of theater. HMTA winners are nominated and selected by a jury of nationally recognized arts leaders in the field of theater. The 2022 HMTA Award Committee included **Lynn Nottage**, two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and past Hermitage Fellow; **David Henry Hwang**, Tony, Grammy, and Obie Award winner; and **Regina Taylor**, Golden Globe Award-winning actress, director, playwright, educator, activist, and past Hermitage Fellow.

"It is thrilling to be able to uplift and support the work of Shariffa Ali, said 2022 HMTA Award Committee member **Lynn Nottage**. "She, like her fellow finalists Jonathan McCrory, Vanessa German, and José Rivera, is a groundbreaking artist whose work continues to push the boundaries of storytelling in inventive and inspiring ways."

"Shariffa is a brave and brilliant theater maker – sensitive and bold in her craft, challenging and subversive in her choices," added fellow juror **Regina Taylor**. "The Hermitage Major Theater Award is a change maker, and I'm excited about what Shariffa will create and share with us in this next year ahead."

“I am thrilled to help give a groundbreaking artist the time and resources to bring their vision to life,” remarked **David Henry Hwang**. “All of our finalists are game-changing innovators, so this was a very tough decision. Ultimately, Shariffa’s idea proved clear, compelling, necessary, and irresistible. I hope to see all our finalists’ projects realized and am grateful to the Hermitage for giving each a residency so they can advance their work!”

Three distinguished finalists for the 2022 Hermitage Major Theater Award include **Vanessa German**, a citizen artist working across sculpture, performance, communal rituals, immersive installation, and photography; **Jonathan McCrory**, an Obie Award-winning director and producer; and **José Rivera**, an Obie Award winner and Oscar-nominated writer. Each will receive a Hermitage residency, in addition to a cash prize of \$1,000.

“Amidst these four brilliant finalists, Shariffa Ali revealed herself to be a passionate theater artist who impressed the 2022 Award Committee with her compelling and inspired vision,” said Hermitage Artistic Director and CEO **Andy Sandberg**. “Shariffa proudly defines herself as a ‘theater maker,’ and the project she has proposed will allow to her to delve into her many talents as a creator, director, and storyteller. I must thank our extraordinary dream-team of an Award Committee – Lynn Nottage, David Henry Hwang, and Regina Taylor – for their thoughtfulness, leadership, and care throughout this process. I also want to congratulate Vanessa German, Jonathan McCrory, and José Rivera, each of whom are exceptional artists with bold voices and thrilling ideas. We are excited to welcome all four of these extraordinary talents into the Hermitage family.”

Born in Kenya and raised in South Africa, **Shariffa Chelimo Ali** is an international theater maker, creative leader, director, and educator committed to advancing radical change through the power of art and activism. In addition to her theater credits, Ali’s films have been featured at acclaimed film/VR festivals and institutions throughout the world, including Sundance Film Festival (USA); Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art (South Africa); Brooklyn Film Festival (USA); Pan African Film Festival (USA); Electric Africa VR festival (South Africa) and DOK Neuland (Germany). In 2022, Ali was named the Elizabeth M. Swayzee Artist-in-Residence at Miami University, where she curated the inaugural Black Roots Festival in the spring of 2022. Ali has been a director and arts

administrator at The Public Theater and The New Group, both in New York. She has directed and lectured at Yale University, NYU, Brooklyn College, and Princeton University, where she is currently a faculty member at the Lewis Center for the Arts. Shariffa.com

In describing her intended HMTA commission, Ali writes: “Despite the homophobia and transphobia inherent in small-town South Africa, a middle school choir, their principal, and their parents make an agreement to disguise the town’s most talented and beloved singer Vuyo (he/they) as a girl in order to have him sing as a female soloist in a national choir competition. As Vuyo increasingly feels at home in this new role as a female soloist, they begin a journey that will see them come to reckon with identity, community, and finding a voice of truth.” Vuyo is a friend and collaborator of this year’s HMTA recipient, so Ali is particularly passionate about capturing the heart and soul of her friend’s true story through this commission. “It is my hope that Vuyo’s remarkable story and lessons of healing and forging community can be a healing force for us all.”

In addition to the \$35,000 commission, the recipient of the annual HMTA will receive six weeks of residency at the Hermitage’s historic beachfront campus to develop the new work, as well as a reading or workshop in a leading arts and cultural center. This year’s commission is expected to receive its development workshop in the fall of 2023.

In the spirit of the Hermitage’s commitment to the arts across multiple disciplines, recipients of the Hermitage Major Theater Award are encouraged to create a commission that directly or indirectly represents the role and impact of art – musical, literary, theatrical, visual, or otherwise – in our culture and society.

As to how this will infuse Ali’s commission, she explains that “we will witness how being part of an ensemble-based arts activity like a choir can alter the course of one’s destiny. Choirs serve as a place of belonging and community and provide people with opportunities to travel and grow in ways that one would not ordinarily be able to achieve. Through this true story, we learn how the arts can lead to discovery and adventure which ultimately lead to finding one’s voice.”

This distinguished Hermitage Major Theater Award recognition is not an award for an existing work, but rather it is designed as a commission that shall serve as a catalyst and inspiration to a theater artist to create a new, original, and impactful piece of theater.

Further, the prize is intended to bridge the connection between the Hermitage and Sarasota County, where the commission is born, and other leading arts and culture centers around the world, including New York, London, Chicago, and other leading arts capitals where great theater is frequently developed and presented.

“This award is designed to be transformational for its recipients, providing not only significant funds and recognition, but also invaluable time, space, and inspiration at the Hermitage, as well as an opportunity for these innovative theater artists to workshop and develop their original ideas,” said Andy Sandberg. An acclaimed director, writer, and Tony Award-winning producer, Sandberg took the helm as Artistic Director and CEO of the Hermitage in early 2020. “In addition to introducing a new work of theater to the American canon each year, this is an exciting opportunity for the Hermitage to take a further step in supporting the artistic process as we offer developmental resources to these extraordinary artists and their new commissions along their journey.”

The Hermitage Major Theater Award is made possible with a generous multi-year gift to the Hermitage from Flora Major and the Kutya Major Foundation.

“Anyone who values and appreciates the arts, across all disciplines, needs to invest in supporting artists in the earliest stages of their creative process — this is what the Hermitage does so well,” remarked **Flora Major**, founder and trustee of the Kutya Major Foundation. “I am so excited by the Award Committee’s selection of Shariffa. She is a passionate shining star who I know will make us all proud, and we are truly honored to have had such incredible artists like David Henry Hwang, Lynn Nottage, and Regina Taylor guiding this nomination and selection process,” added Major. “I hope this initiative will inspire others who are passionate about the arts to recognize and support the important work that the Hermitage is doing to support what is new and original at the true ground floor.”

The inaugural Hermitage Major Theater Award was presented in 2021 to theater artist and filmmaker **Radha Blank**, who received critical acclaim for her film *The Forty-Year-Old Version*, available on Netflix. Blank’s HMTA commission is currently in development with a workshop anticipated later this year in New York.

In addition to this newly created commission, the Hermitage Artist Retreat annually awards the prestigious jury-selected Hermitage Greenfield Prize (HGP), a \$30,000

commission that rotates each year between the disciplines of music, theater, and visual art. Past recipients in theater have included **Aleshea Harris** (2021), **Martyna Majok** (2018), **Nilo Cruz** (2015), **John Guare** (2012), and **Craig Lucas** (2009).

The Hermitage hosts artists on its Gulf Coast Manasota Key campus for multi-week residencies, where diverse and accomplished artists from around the world and across multiple disciplines create and develop new works of theater, music, visual art, literature, dance, and more. As part of their residencies, Hermitage Fellows participate in free community programs, offering audiences in the region a unique opportunity to engage with some of the world's leading artists and to get an authentic "sneak peek" into extraordinary projects and artistic minds before their works go on to major theaters, galleries, concert halls, and museums around the world. These free and innovative programs include performances, lectures, readings, interactive experiences, open studios, school programs, teacher workshops, and more, serving thousands in our community each year. The Hermitage is the only major arts organization in Florida's Gulf Coast region exclusively committed to supporting the development and creation of new work across all artistic disciplines.

*For more information about the Hermitage and the Hermitage Major Theater Award, visit [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org).*

***"An organization that does more for artists than any I have encountered."***

—Craig Lucas, Tony Award Nominee & Hermitage Greenfield Prize Winner

***"It was like someone opened the door and invited me to create a work that is responsive to this time, a work that can be reflective of this time..."***

***I am super grateful for that."***

—Aleshea Harris, Playwright and 2021 Hermitage Greenfield Prize Winner

***"Because of the Hermitage, some of the most beautiful plays have been written, and the most beautiful music has been made."***

—Emily Mann, Playwright, Director & Tony Award Winner

***"A spark plug for ideas and collaborations: a miraculous co-mingling of music, literature, visual art, theater, nature, and wildlife."***

—Claire Chase, Flutist, MacArthur Genius & Avery Fisher Prize Winner

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## **The Hermitage Artist Retreat**

Artistic Director and CEO: Andy Sandberg

The Hermitage is a non-profit 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 14 Pulitzer Prize winners, Poets Laureate, MacArthur 'Genius' Fellows, and multiple Tony, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar winners and nominees. 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, the newly announced \$35,000 Hermitage Major Theater Award for an original theater commission, and the Aspen Music Festival's Hermitage Prize in Composition.

**For more information, visit [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org).**

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

Hermitage programs are supported, in part, by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts; by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax Revenues; and by The State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture (Section 286.25 Florida Statutes), as well as the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

## **BIOS**

### **WINNER OF THE 2022 HERMITAGE MAJOR THEATER AWARD**

#### **Shariffa Ali**

Shariffa Chelimo Ali, born in Kenya and raised in South Africa, is an international theater maker, creative leader, director, and academic committed to advancing radical change through the power of art and activism. As a filmmaker, Ali's works have been featured at acclaimed film/VR festivals and institutions throughout the world, including Sundance Film Festival (USA); Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art (South Africa); Brooklyn Film Festival (USA); Pan African Film Festival (USA); Electric Africa VR festival (South Africa) and DOK Neuland (Germany). As a theater artist and academic, Ali has taught at NYU, Brooklyn College, Yale University, and Princeton University. Past theater productions include *Eclipsed*, *Detroit '67*, *Intimate Apparel*, *We Are Proud to Present*, and an original new musical called *We Were Everywhere*. In 2022, Ali was named Elizabeth M. Swayzee Artist-in-Residence at Miami University, where she curated the inaugural Black Roots Festival in the spring of 2022.

## **2022 HMTA FINALISTS**

**“Each finalist is overly qualified – truly one of a kind, and offering deeply profound ideas and work.”**

–Regina Taylor, 2022 Hermitage Major Theater Award Committee

### **Vanessa German**

Vanessa German is a self-taught citizen artist working across sculpture, performance, communal rituals, immersive installation, and photography, in order to repair and reshape disrupted systems, spaces, and connections. The artist’s practice proposes new models for social healing, utilizing creativity and tenderness as vital forces to reckon with the historical and ongoing catastrophes of structural racism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, resource extraction, and misogynoir.

### **Jonathan McCrory**

Jonathan McCrory is a two-time Obie Award-winning, Harlem-based artist who is the Executive Artistic Director at National Black Theatre under the leadership of CEO Sade Lythcott. He has directed productions and concerts, which include: *How the Light Gets In* (NYMF), *Klook* and *Iron John* (NAMT), *Dead and Breathing*, *HandsUp*, *Hope Speaks*, *Blacken The Bubble*, *Last Laugh*, and *Enter Your Sleep*. He has worked at ETW at TISCH NYU devising *Emergence: A Communion & evoking him: Baldwin* and at SUNY Purchase directing *Exit Strategy* and *A Beautiful Day in November on the Banks of the Greatest of the Great Lakes*. He was an artist-in-residence of AllArts and created a short film, *The Roll Call: The Roots To Strange Fruit*. He has been acknowledged through Craine’s NY Business 2020 Notable LGBTQ Leaders and Executives, awarded the Emerging Producer Award by the National Black Theatre Festival, and Torch Bearer Award by Woodie King Jr. He is a founding member of Harlem9, Black Theatre Commons, The Jubilee, Next Generation National Network and The Movement Theatre Company. McCrory currently sits on the National Advisory Committee for Howlround.com. As a Washington, DC native, he attended the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and then Tisch School of the Arts. JonathanMcCrory.com

### **José Rivera**

José Rivera is a recipient of Obie Awards for *Marisol* and *References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot*, both produced by The Public Theater (New York), and seen regionally and internationally. Other plays: *Cloud Tectonics*, *Boleros for the Disenchanted*, *Sueño*, *Sonnets for an Old Century*, *School of the Americas*, *Massacre (Sing to Your Children)*, *Brainpeople*, *Adoration of the Old Woman*, *The House of Ramon Iglesia*, *Another Word for Beauty*, *The Maids*, *The Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, *Each Day Dies with Sleep*, *Lovesong (Imperfect)*, and *Your Name Means Dream*. “The Motorcycle Diaries” was nominated for a 2005 Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay – making Rivera the first Puerto Rican writer nominated for an Academy Award. Other nominations include a BAFTA and Writers Guild Award. His “On the Road” premiered at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival. Rivera co-created and produced “Eerie, Indiana” (NBC) and was a consultant and writer on “Penny Dreadful: City of Angels” (Showtime). Rivera’s short films “The Fall of a Sparrow” and “The Civet” have been seen in film festivals around the country. He directed his play *Sonnets for an Old Century* for Paula Vogel’s Bard at the Gate. He is the sole writer of a new Netflix series based on *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.



## **2022 AWARD COMMITTEE BIOS**

### **Lynn Nottage**

Hermitage Fellow Lynn Nottage is the first woman in history to win two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. She is currently nominated for two Tony Awards as the author of *Clyde's* and the libretto for *MJ: The Musical*. Her plays have been produced widely in the United States and throughout the world. Recent work includes the libretto for the opera *Intimate Apparel* (LCT), the libretto for the musical *MJ* (Broadway), *Clyde's* (Broadway, 2ST), and co-curating the performance installation *The Watering Hole* (Signature Theater). Other work includes the musical adaptation of *The Secret Life of Bees* (Atlantic Theater); *Mlima's Tale*; *Sweat* (Pulitzer Prize, Obie, Evening Standard Award, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize); *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* (Lilly Award); *Ruined* (Pulitzer Prize, Obie, Lortel, NY Drama Critics' Circle, AUDELCO, Drama Desk and OCC Awards); *Intimate Apparel* (American Theatre Critics and NY Drama Critics' Circle). TV: Writer/Producer of *She's Gotta Have It* (Netflix), Consulting Producer on *Dickinson* (Apple TV+). Awards: PEN/Laura Pels Master Dramatist Award, Doris Duke Artist Award, Hermitage Fellowship, American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship. She is an Associate Professor at Columbia University School of the Arts, and is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

### **David Henry Hwang**

David Henry Hwang's stage work includes the plays *M. Butterfly*, *Chinglish*, *Yellow Face*, *Golden Child*, *The Dance and the Railroad*, and *FOB*, as well as the Broadway musicals *Aida*, *Flower Drum Song* (2002 revival), and Disney's *Tarzan*. His screenplays include *M. Butterfly*, and he is currently penning the live-action feature musical remake of Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* as well as an Anna May Wong biopic to star actress Gemma Chan. For television, he was a Writer/Consulting Producer for the Golden Globe-winning television series *The Affair* and is now creating two television series, *Billion Dollar Whale* for Westward/SKG and another for Netflix. Called America's most-produced living opera librettist, he has written thirteen libretti, including five with composer Philip Glass. He also co-wrote the Gold Record "Solo" with the late pop music icon Prince. Hwang is a Tony Award winner and three-time nominee, a three-time OBIE Award winner, a Grammy Award winner who has been twice nominated, and a three-time Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama. A professor at Columbia University School of the Arts, Hwang is a Trustee of the American Theatre Wing, where he served as Chair, and sits on the Council of the Dramatist Guild. Recent honors include his 2022 induction onto the Lucille Lortel Playwrights' Sidewalk and his 2021 induction into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His newest musical, *Soft Power*, a collaboration with composer and Hermitage Fellow Jeanine Tesori, opened in New York at the Public Theater, where it received a 2020 Grammy nomination for Best Musical Theatre Album and was a Finalist for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Drama. In 2016, The David Henry Hwang Society was founded by William C. Boles (Rollins College), Martha Johnson (University of Minnesota), and Esther Kim Lee (University of Maryland). The DHH Society is devoted to the scholarly examination of plays by David Henry Hwang.

## **Regina Taylor**

Golden Globe Award-winning actress, director, playwright, educator, activist, and Hermitage Fellow Regina Taylor is the Andrew W. Mellon Playwright-in-Residence for Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. Taylor is writing new plays for Audible and for The Old Vic, and she is the curator/director of the “Black Album Mixtape” in collaboration with SMU – an initiative created by Taylor to invite creatives from all fields to think about ways to create a better future. Taylor’s playwright credits include *Bread, Crowns* (four Helen Hayes Awards, including Best Director), *Oo-Bla-Dee* (Steinberg-ATCA Award), *Drowning Crow* (Broadway, MTC), *The Trinity River Plays* (Edgerton Foundation Award) and *stop.reset*. She received the Denzel Washington Endowed Chair in Theater at Fordham University at Lincoln Center. An artistic associate of the Goodman Theatre, Taylor is its most produced playwright. As an actor, she is featured in *First Lady*, *Love Craft Country*, and *All Day and a Night*, and guest stars in *Council of Dads*, *Red Line*, and *The Good Fight*. She received a Golden Globe Award for Best Performance by an Actress for her role as Lily Harper in *I’ll Fly Away*, three NAACP Image Awards, and two Emmy Award nominations. Taylor was the first African American lead in Masterpiece Theatre’s *Cora Unashamed*, starred as Anita Hill in HBO’s *Strange Justice* (Gracie Award), and *A Good Day to Die*, starring Sidney Poitier. Taylor was also the first Black woman to play Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* on Broadway.

[HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org)