

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Media Contacts:

National / New York: Candi Adams; (917) 776-1170; CandiAdamsNYC@gmail.com

Florida: Hermitage Media Relations; (941) 475-2098, Ext. 8;

Communications@HermitageArtistRetreat.org



**The Hermitage Artist Retreat
Announces
Playwright and Screenwriter
Madeleine George
as 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 the HMTA included Pulitzer Prize Winner **Doug Wright**, Tony-nominated and Obie Award-winning director **Leigh Silverman**, and award-winning director of stage and film **Liesl Tommy**.*

“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 time.”

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

(September 7, 2022) Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and CEO of the Hermitage Artist Retreat, announced today that accomplished playwright and screenwriter **Madeleine George**, currently a writer on the hit Hulu series “Only Murders in the Building,” has been newly selected as the 2021 recipient of the **Hermitage Major Theater Award (HMTA)**. This national jury-selected prize, 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. George 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. Originally awarded in December of 2021 to Radha Blank who is not able to fulfill the commission due to conflicting professional commitments, the inaugural Award Committee reconvened to enthusiastically endorse George – one of four distinguished finalists nominated in the initial process – for this prestigious honor.

Madeleine George's plays include *Hurricane Diane* (Obie Award), *The (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence* (Pulitzer Prize finalist; Outer Critics Circle John Gassner Award), *Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England* (Susan Smith Blackburn finalist), *Precious Little*, and *The Zero Hour* (Jane Chambers Award, Lambda Literary Award finalist). Honors include a Whiting Award, the Princess Grace Award, and a Lilly Award. Her translation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* premiered at Two River Theater in 2022, and her audio adaptation of Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* is forthcoming from Audible Originals. Madeleine is a founding member of the Obie Award-winning playwrights' collective 13P. She is currently a writer and producer on Hulu's acclaimed mystery-comedy *Only Murders in the Building*, starring Steve Martin, Martin Short, and Selena Gomez.

"I was surprised and thrilled to get the news about the Hermitage Major Theater Award," said George on receiving the news from Artistic Director and CEO Andy Sandberg. "It's such an honor to be joining in the Hermitage's awe-inspiring family of artists, and I'm excited to have resources and time to put towards my commissioned play, which has been on my mind for a while and which I'm eager to share with the world."

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 2021 HMTA Award Committee included **Doug Wright**, Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning playwright, and past president of the Dramatists Guild of America; **Leigh Silverman**, Tony Award nominee and Obie Award-winning director; and **Liesl Tommy**, Tony Award nominee and Obie Award-Winning stage and screen director.

“Madeleine George is an acute and often hilarious commentator on American culture, skewering ‘sacred cows’ like gender, technology, academia, and our patriarchal government and – in doing so – reveals the maddening inconsistencies of the human heart,” said 2021 HMTA Award Committee member **Doug Wright**, who has since joined the Hermitage Board of Trustees.

The other distinguished finalists for the 2021 Hermitage Major Theater Award included **Eisa Davis**, an Obie Award-winning multi-disciplinary theater-maker, and **Luis Alfaro**, an accomplished playwright and MacArthur ‘Genius’ Fellow. Each has been awarded a Hermitage residency and Fellowship, in addition to a cash prize of \$1,000.

“Amidst such a brilliant group of finalists, the inaugural Award Committee was faced with an incredibly difficult decision in determining a recipient for this award,” said Hermitage Artistic Director and CEO **Andy Sandberg**. “Madeleine George is one of the American theater’s most gracious and gifted talents, and we’re honored to present her with the HMTA. The heart and humor in her writing is enhanced by her generous spirit and her deep passion for the theater. I must also sing the praises of Luis Alfaro and Eisa Davis, both exceptional artists with bold voices and thrilling ideas.”

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. Madeleine George’s commission is expected to receive a development workshop in the fall of 2023.

“The play I plan to work on is a Faust story set in a bowling alley called *The Sore Loser*,” said George of her plans for the commission. “It’s a comedy about power, domination, and the death of the patriarchy, as told through a small-town bowling tournament.” 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, dance, or otherwise – in our culture and society. As to how this will infuse George’s commission, she explains that “one thing I’m trying to do with this play is to enact the transition from the hero narrative we’re all familiar with to a new kind of narrative driven by collective action. I’m curious about what kind of stories we

can tell – particularly comic stories – that can help us unlearn the structures of domination that have a stranglehold on mainstream Western culture.”

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 notable arts capitals where great theater is frequently developed and presented. Theater-maker and director **Shariffa Ali** was awarded the HMTA in the spring of 2022, and her commission is also expected to receive a developmental workshop in the fall of 2023.

“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 that the jury has chosen to recognize Madeleine with this award – she is as delightful as she is talented! It’s an honor to support truly wonderful people like Madeleine and Shariffa in bringing their visions to life, and 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. Andy and his team are focused on celebrating what is truly new and original, and at the ground floor.”

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**.*

"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

“I haven’t been able to write for weeks up in New York, but I wrote for eight hours straight yesterday, and that’s what this place is for. The Hermitage breeds something unique, and without it, I cannot tell you how much work would not happen.”

Jeanine Tesori, Tony Award-Winning Composer and Pulitzer Prize Finalist

“If you trace the trajectory of the artists and the works that come out of the Hermitage, the body of work that has been unleashed into the world is not just big in terms of number, but big in terms of impact.”

Limor Tomer, Director of Live Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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 15 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.

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 2021 HERMITAGE MAJOR THEATER AWARD

Madeleine George

Madeleine George’s plays include *Hurricane Diane* (Obie Award), *The (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence* (Pulitzer Prize finalist; Outer Critics Circle John Gassner Award), *Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England* (Susan Smith Blackburn finalist), *Precious Little*, and *The Zero Hour* (Jane Chambers Award, Lambda Literary Award finalist). Her plays have been performed in New York at Clubbed Thumb, Playwrights Horizons and New York Theatre Workshop, and around the country at Perseverance Theater in Juneau, the Huntington in Boston, the Old Globe in San Diego, Shotgun Players in Berkeley, City Theater in Pittsburgh, Theater Wit in Chicago, and Two River

Theater in New Jersey, among many other places. She has been a Banff Arts Centre Resident Artist, a two-time Hedgebrook Writer in Residence, a three-time resident at SPACE on Ryder Farm, and a four-time MacDowell Fellow. She's a member of New Dramatists' Class of 2017, a Clubbed Thumb Writers Group member, and an alum of the Lark Playwrights Workshop, the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, and the Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab. Honors include the Princess Grace Award, a Manhattan Theater Club Playwriting Fellowship, a Lilly Award, and a Whiting Award for Drama. Madeleine holds a BA from Cornell University and an MFA from NYU. She has taught writing in various forms at Barnard College, Bard College, NYU, Rutgers, the Universities of Michigan, Maryland, Arkansas, Indiana, and Minnesota, and Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, Cornell, and Brown. For many years she led free writing workshops around New York City, including at Queensboro Correctional Facility; Hopper House, an alternative-to-incarceration program for women; a pre-trial intervention program run by the Brooklyn DA; Island Academy, the public school on Rikers Island; a senior citizens group in Fort Greene Park; and the Ali Forney Center, a shelter for homeless LGBTQ youth. Since 2006, she has worked with the Bard Prison Initiative at Bard College, a degree-granting liberal arts program operating in seven New York State prisons. She currently serves as BPI's Director of Admissions. In 2022, Madeleine's translation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* premiered at Two River Theater, where she recently completed a six-year stint as the Mellon Playwright in Residence. Her ten-episode audio adaptation of Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* is forthcoming in 2023 from Audible Originals. Madeleine is a founding member of the Obie-Award-winning playwrights' collective 13P (www.13p.org). She's written on shows for FX and HBO, and is currently a writer/producer on the Hulu mystery-comedy *Only Murders in the Building*, nominated for WGA and Emmy Awards for Best Comedy.

2021 HMTA FINALISTS

Luis Alfaro

Luis Alfaro is a Chicano playwright born and raised in downtown Los Angeles. He is the Associate Artistic Director of Center Theatre Group, the resident theater company of the Music Center of Los Angeles County, home of the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson Theatre, and Kirk Douglas Theater. Alfaro is the recipient of a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, popularly known as a "Genius Grant," awarded to people who have demonstrated expertise and exceptional creativity in their respective fields. He has also received recognition from the PEN America/Laura Pels International Foundation Theater Award for a Master Dramatist; United States Artist Fellowship; Ford Foundation's Art of Change Fellowship; Joyce Foundation Fellowship; Mellon Foundation Fellowship; and the Annenberg Artist-in-Residence for the city of Santa Monica; among others. He is the only playwright to have received two Kennedy Center 'Fund for New American Play' awards in the same year. Alfaro spent six seasons as the inaugural Playwright-in-Residence of the ninety-year-old Oregon Shakespeare Festival (2013-2019); a member of the Playwright's Ensemble at Chicago's Victory Gardens Theatre (2013-2020); a resident artist at the Mark Taper Forum (1995-2005); an inaugural member of the Latinx Playwrights 'Circle of Imaginistas' at the Los Angeles Theatre Center (2021). and has worked with the Ojai Playwrights Conference since 2002. His

plays and performances include *Electricidad*, *Oedipus El Rey*, *Mojada*, *Delano*, *Body of Faith*, *Straight as a Line*, and have been seen at regional theatres throughout the United States, Latin America, Canada and Europe. Alfaro spent over two decades in the Los Angeles Poetry and Performance Art communities. He is an Associate Professor with tenure at the University of Southern California (USC). Previously, he taught at California Institute of the Arts (Cal-Arts), and in the Writers Program at UCLA Extension. He has an Emmy-nominated short film, *Chicanismo* (Best Experimental Film, San Antonio CineFestival, Best Short, CineAccion San Francisco) and an award-winning recording, *Downtown*, on SST/New Alliance Records (Best Spoken-Word Release, National Association of Independent Record Distributors).

Eisa Davis

Eisa Davis is an award-winning, multi-disciplinary artist working on stage and screen. Notable television and film work includes *Mare of Easttown*, *Pose*, *Betty*, *Bluff City Law*, *God Friended Me*, *The Looming Tower*, *Succession*, *Rise*, *House of Cards*, *Hart of Dixie*, *The Wire*, *First Match*, *Welcome to The Rileys*, and *After The Wedding*. She has originated stage roles in *The Secret Life of Bees* (AUDELCO Award), *Kings* (Drama League nomination), *Remembrance* (Afrofemmonomy), *Grace Notes*, *Preludes*, *This*, *The Call*, *Luck of the Irish*, *Angela's Mixtape* and *Passing Strange*. Davis has written thirteen full-length plays and released two albums of original music. Her plays include *Paper Armor*, *Umkovu*, *Angela's Mixtape*, *Six Minutes*, *Warriors Don't Cry*, *Hip Hop Anansi*, *The History of Light*, *Ramp*, *The Essentialisn't*, *||: Girls :||: Chance :||: Music :||*, and *Mushroom* (upcoming 2022 at People's Light). She wrote the narration for Cirque du Soleil's *Crystal* and episodes for both seasons of Spike Lee's Netflix series *She's Gotta Have It*. Distinctions include three Lortel nominations, an Obie Award for Sustained Excellence in Performance, a Creative Capital Award, and the Herb Alpert Award in Theatre. She is currently producing and co-writing two episodes for the upcoming sequel to *Justified* for FX, and executive producing and creating a limited series with UCP, Fuzzy Door, and Xception Content based on the memoir of the youngest member of the Little Rock Nine. Davis was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize with her play *Bulrusher*.

2021 AWARD COMMITTEE BIOS

Doug Wright

Doug Wright is a Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning playwright, longtime President of the Dramatists Guild, and a proud Hermitage alumnus. His play *Quills* premiered at Washington, D.C.'s Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in 1995 and subsequently had its debut Off-Broadway at New York Theatre Workshop. *Quills* garnered the 1995 Kesselring Prize for Best New American Play from the National Arts Club and, for Wright, a 1996 Village Voice Obie Award for Outstanding Achievement in Playwriting. In 2000, Wright wrote the screenplay for the film version of *Quills*, which starred Geoffrey Rush. Wright's *I Am My Own Wife* was produced Off-Broadway by Playwrights Horizons in 2003. It transferred to Broadway where it won the Tony Award for Best Play, as well as the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The subject of this one-person play, which starred Jefferson Mays, is the German transvestite Charlotte von Mahlsdorf. In 2006, Wright wrote the book for *Grey Gardens*. The musical is based on the Maysles brothers' 1975 film documentary

of the same title about Edith Ewing Bouvier Beale (“Big Edie”) and her daughter Edith Bouvier Beale (“Little Edie”), Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis’s aunt and cousin. He adapted Disney’s film *The Little Mermaid* for the Broadway musical, which opened in 2007. In 2009, he was commissioned by the La Jolla Playhouse to adapt and direct *Creditors* by August Strindberg. In another La Jolla commission, he wrote the book for the musical *Hands on a Hardbody*, with the score by Amanda Green and Trey Anastasio. The musical had a brief run on Broadway in March and April 2013 after premiering at the La Jolla Playhouse in 2012. For television, Wright worked on four pilots for producer Norman Lear and teleplays for Hallmark Entertainment and HBO. In film, Wright’s credits include screenplays for Fine Line Features, Fox Searchlight, and DreamWorks SKG. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild and serves on the board of New York Theatre Workshop. He is a recipient of the William L. Bradley Fellowship at Yale University, the Charles MacArthur Fellowship at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, an HBO Fellowship in playwriting and the Alfred Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University. In 2010 he was named a United States Artists Fellow. Wright lives in New York City with his partner, songwriter David Clement.

Leigh Silverman

Leigh Silverman is a Tony Award-nominated and Obie Award-winning director. Broadway credits include *Grand Horizons* (2nd Stage, Williamstown Theater Festival); *The Lifespan of a Fact* (Studio 54); *Violet* (Roundabout, Tony Award nomination); *Chinglish* (Goodman Theatre; Longacre Theatre); *Well* (Public Theater, ACT, Longacre Theatre). Recent Off-Broadway credits include *Soft Power* (Public Theater, Ahmanson Theater, Curran Theater, Tony Award nomination); *Tumacho* (Clubbed Thumb); *Hurricane Diane* (New York Theatre Workshop; Two River Theater); *Harry Clarke* (Vineyard Theatre/Audible, Minetta Lane; Lortel nomination); *Wild Goose Dreams* (Public Theater; La Jolla Playhouse); *Sweet Charity* (New Group); *On the Exhale* (Roundabout); *The Outer Space* (Public Theater). *Encores: Bring Me to Light; Violet; The Wild Party; Really Rosie*. 2011 Obie Award and 2019 Obie for Sustained Excellence. Upcoming projects include *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* (The Shed) and *Suffs* (Public Theater).

Liesl Tommy

Liesl Tommy is an award-winning international theater director and director of the recently released MGM biopic *Respect*, based on the life of Aretha Franklin and starring Jennifer Hudson. She is also the director of the upcoming film *Born a Crime*, based on Trevor Noah’s best-selling memoir, starring Lupita Nyong’o. Tommy directed the world premiere of *Eclipsed* on Broadway, for which she was Tony Award-nominated for Best Direction of a Play. She makes her Goodman Theatre directorial debut with the world premiere musical adaptation of *The Outsiders*.

HermitageArtistRetreat.org