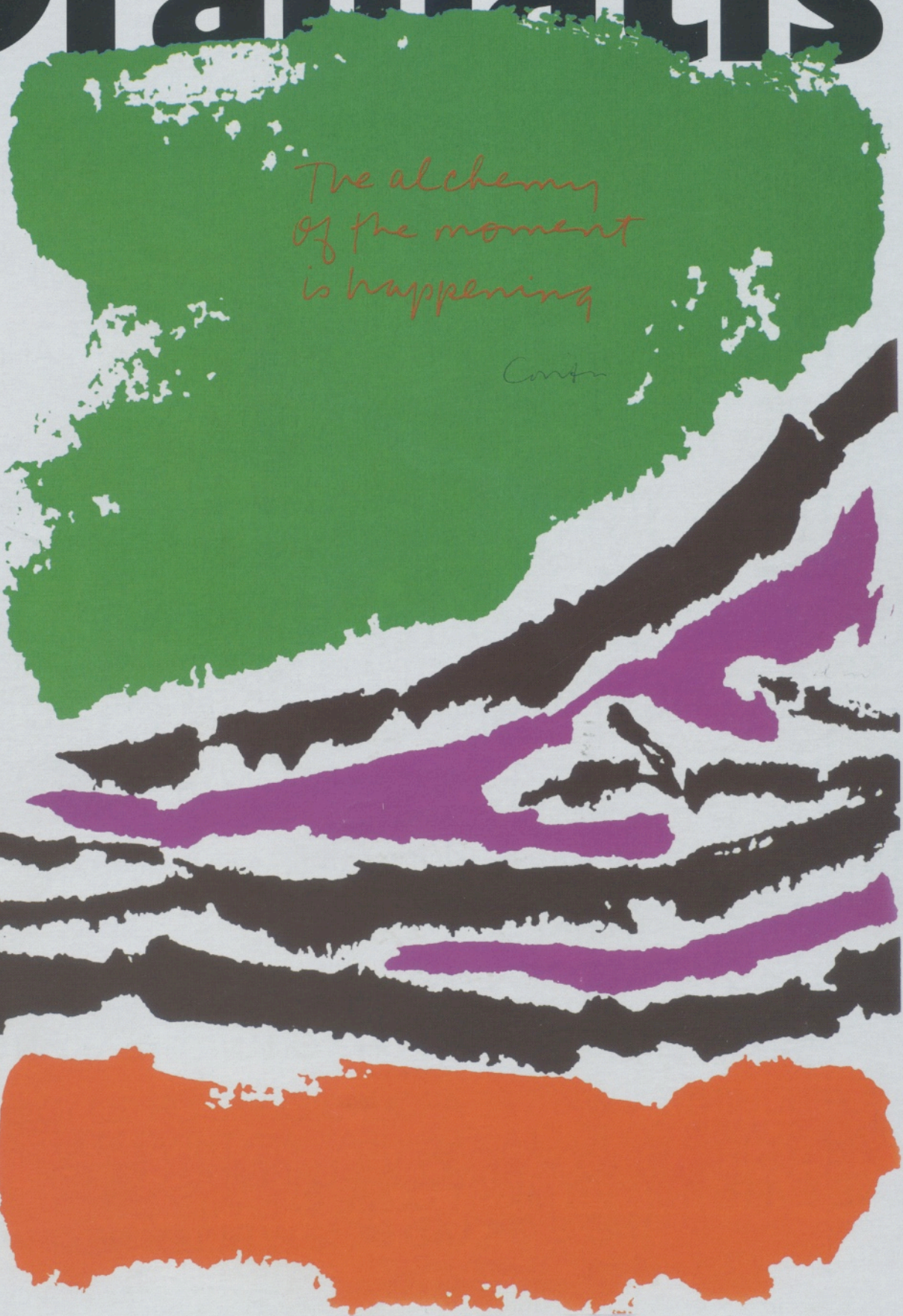


The Dramatist



*The alchemy
of the moment
is happening*

Contra

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have social,
cultural
or political
events ever
impacted
a work in
progress or
caused you
to rethink
a play years
later?

JEREMY LLORENCE

Recent events have shaped both an old play and a play I'm currently writing. The first instance was with my play *Fourth & Long*. Set in Detroit, the play follows Orion, a fictional football player suspended for misconduct on the field, and Ashli, a survivor of domestic abuse currently running a senior living center. Together, the two attempt to find hope in their new lives.

A crucial turning point happens when the two visit



Belle Isle, an island park on the Detroit River. When I initially drafted the play, Belle Isle had been the victim of long-term neglect by the city. The last time I'd visited, the place was charming, but a dump. In this scene, Ashli and Orion see the park and remember that it used to be a place of beauty and that it—and perhaps they—can be beautiful again.

However, by the time I had the play produced in Kalamazoo in 2015, management of Belle Isle had shifted to the state of Michigan, under the administration of Gov. Rick Snyder. As a result, the park has been cleaned up. It's much nicer now, as an audience member pointed out to me on

works exploded. They covered the city as far as the eye could see, loud, and full of violent light.

The presidential campaign was going on full steam and was fast becoming a joke: a bankrupt real estate developer vs. a competent, intelligent (female) public servant. It should have been no contest, but I felt uneasy. The developer had spent a lot of time denigrating immigrants, especially Mexicans, and the mood shift against the undocumented was ugly and frightening.

I went downstairs after the fireworks died down and I started writing. My play, *Policarpa* is based on the true story of a beloved Colombian revolutionary, who is shrouded in hagiography. I tore her story apart, humanized her, and put her into a modern, post-apocalyptic reality. The play is about women in war, women in harsh authoritarian regimes, women saving themselves.

I kept writing as I was forced to relive trauma, thanks to the release of the “grabbing women by the pussy” tape. My play fell deeper and deeper into an angry rabbit hole, where my women became angels of vengeance, bringing the plague and death with their sex. Reclaiming their power in the only way allowed to them by the men in their lives. I finished the first draft on November 10th and it was a very dark, hopeless play.

I’m into the third draft of *Policarpa* now, strengthening the story, working with collaborators. Trying to take the despair and move it into something deeper, more relevant. I can’t help my writing being political, but I’m trying to make it more than a screed, to add light, to rip apart my hurt and find strength, humor and, dare I say it, hope?

A piece that I had written earlier in the year is currently getting a lot of attention. It’s about a young Latina who discovers that the woman who played “Wonder Woman” on TV was of Mexican descent. That play takes on a new relevance in this administration’s America. My sweet, funny,



little piece about a Xingona reclaiming her identity became fraught with the weight of what it meant to be Mexican in America in 2017.

It’s a burden to be a brown person right now. I don’t have any answers as to why we have become the bad guys, and I am frightened of how far the hatred will go. I can’t and don’t want to try embody the whole of the Latinx experience in

America, we are a diverse group within our diversity. I do, however, feel a deep responsibility to write my experience, and to keep ripping open the hurts, in the hopes that bringing the pain into the light will ultimately heal them.

DIANA BURBANO, is a Colombian immigrant, a nerd, and a playwright. Works include *Linda* (CTGLA Community, 2017), *Policarpa* (The Drama League, 2017), *Fabulous Monsters* (Festival51), *Picture Me Rollin’* (William Inge Festival 2016), and *Silueta* (with Tom and Chris Shelton, Teatro Tercera Llamada 2016). *Caliban’s Island* is published by YouthPLAYS.

DAHN HIUNI

I have a strong activist streak. As a gay man who survived the AIDS epidemic, fighting for human rights and social justice has never been optional. Furthermore, as a grandson of Holocaust victims and survivors, a sensitivity to prejudice and persecution is in my DNA.

While I started out passionately as an abstract painter, I soon faced a moral dilemma with the visual arts: they were silent. I realized that in the face of the social and political realities of my life to which I found it imperative to react, creating inanimate, silent objects was a luxury, an untenable position to take. I needed speech with which to critique my culture. And while I cherish the potent, plaintive power of great works of art that were indeed reacting to their present-day events (from Goya’s *May 3rd, 1808* to *The Guerilla*



Girls), I felt I had to trade in images in favor of spoken words, in order to give urgent voice to pressing issues. Playwriting won out. My characters and their predicaments serve to stand witness to social, cultural, and political events in ways that few other art forms can afford. Words won out because of the way they land on ears, in a cutting, unambiguous, and immediate ways.

Social, cultural and political events impact my work throughout, both as impetuses at its source and as editors in its progress. While I do not 'rip from the headlines' per se—for I find ideas take years to brew and coalesce—I am constantly affected and shaped by my world. We ourselves are works in progress, and it would seem odd to me to write in a vacuum, shunning dialogue with the events of the day.

Recently, however, there was one specific way in which cultural shifts immediately affected my writing 'in real time,' as it were. When doing research for *Murmurs & Incantations*, a play that is in part about my great-grandfather's experience in the Holocaust, I made a startling discovery. Through deep Internet searches, I found his records in the Polish State Archives and discovered the truth about his death, which was very different from the family myth that was perpetuated in his memory. Thus, the newfound willingness of the Polish government agencies to share information, in the name of transparency and reconciliation, some 70 to 80 years later, together with today's information technologies, revealed stunning new facts and provided a real-life *twist in the story* as I was writing! I was sharply reminded that the writing process is alive, and the supposed truths on which it is based must be constantly revisited. It reminded me not to enter the narrative as a *fait accompli*, for just as we listen to our characters for authenticity and guidance, so must we listen to the fluid events that affect them.



CATHERINE FILLOUX

When I was in the process of working on my plays *Eyes of the Heart* (2004, National Asian American Theatre Company) and *Silence of God* (2002, Contemporary American Theater Festival) I was impacted as I wrote by the extent of the United States' complicity in Cambodia, and how I would further activate that in my stories. Sarah in *Silence of God*:

SARAH: Together we lived in a world of water. This is a world where you float. So beautiful and... bottomless. You might ask yourself how many tears or raindrops or drops of fresh morning dew would it take to fill the ocean, to fill the lake, and I would tell you not as many as you think, and what you see at night in the water, the glistening, bending light, the reflections, are the magic of love, and also your own suffocating drowning. That's the world of water. You can go under the surface and slowly motion to the one you love, and he will answer with his hands. You might ask yourself, "Are we fish, not human?" and I will answer that we are human, but we don't always do human things...

History is always changing, we realize as we live it. The Khmer Rouge Tribunal, bringing some of the people responsible for the genocide in Cambodia to trial, continues to this day. I am currently in the very beginning stages of a play that takes place in Homs, Syria. The story dates back to 2012, however every part of the story is changing day by day. My approach is to look backward and forward at the same time, keeping my focus on the unacceptable and on a leadership's blatant disregard for human integrity.

Selma '65, which was produced by La MaMa in 2014, is about the 1965 Selma Voting March for voting rights, in which U.S. Representative John

DAHN HIUNI is a New York-based Israeli-American playwright. His full-length play *Murmurs & Incantations* was last seen at the historic Soho Playhouse as part of the 2016 New York International Fringe Festival, where it won the Award for Excellence in Playwriting.