EVENT SUMMARY

Title
Resisting the Exotic: Eradicating Colonial Narratives of Desire

Description
Exoticism, a legacy of colonialism, continues to appear in writing and other forms of media. The concept implies desire and conquest, as exotic people, places and even animals are foreign enough to be fantasized about, but unthreatening enough to be subjugated. This assumption of passivity harms communities by diminishing their humanity, which allows them to be targets of violence. On this panel, writers will discuss the ways they resist this narrative and how they avoid/subvert exotic tropes.

Category
Multiple Literary Genres Craft and Criticism
BIOS

**Nay Saysourinho - Moderator**

Nay Saysourinho was the inaugural Adina Talve-Goodman Fellow chosen by *One Story*. She has received scholarships and fellowships from Kundiman, The Writers Grotto, The Mendocino Coast Writers Conference and the MacDowell Colony. Her work explores food, nature, and colonialism. Her writing can be found in *The Funambulist*, *The Margins* and *Kenyon Review Online*. She is a regular contributor to the Ploughshares Blog.

**Kirin Khan - Panelist**

Kirin Khan is a 2016 VONA/Voices and 2018 Tin House alum, 2017 PEN Emerging Voices Fellow, 2017 SF Writers Grotto Fellow, 2018 AWP Writer to Writer Mentee and a 2018 Steinbeck Fellow. Her work has appeared in *The Margins*, *sPARKLE & bLINK*, *Your Impossible Voice*, and *7x7.LA* among other publications.

**Mimi Wong - Panelist**

Mimi Wong writes about art and culture. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Catapult*, *Day One*, *Electric Literature*, *Hyperallergic*, *Literary Hub*, *Refinery29*, and *Wildness*. She is also the Editor-in-Chief of the literary magazine *The Offing*.

**Ploi Pirapokin - Panelist**

Ploi Pirapokin's work is featured in *Tor.com*, Apogee Journal, the Offing, the Bellingham Review, and more. She teaches at the Writer's Program at UCLA Extension, Creative Nonfiction Foundation, University of Hong Kong, and is Assistant Director at the School of the Arts' Creative Writing Department.

**Misha Rai - Panelist**

Misha is the 2018-2021 Kenyon Review Fellow in Prose. Her writing has been awarded scholarships and fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Dana Award in the novel category, and the Woodrow Wilson Dissertation Fellowship in Women’s Studies.
EVENT OUTLINE

Arrival
Handouts will be distributed once everyone has been seated.

Welcome and Overview
Accessibility reminders, overview of the schedule

Opening Remarks from the Moderator
Hello everyone and thank you for being here. Today, we are going to have a discussion on the shadow cast by exoticism on our work. Much has been said about it, in academia and in pop culture, but today we’d like to tackle it from a craft perspective. Every time I think we’re maybe over the worst of it, an article, a story or a book comes along that makes me roll my eyes.

On the surface, it seems like a small thing to worry about. “Oh, they write about us like we’re weird and attractive.” But these exotic tropes have real life consequences. Because when a body is deemed exotic, that body becomes unreal. And unreal bodies do not have real opinions. Unreal bodies do not affect policies. Unreal bodies do not feel real pain.

Exoticism beautifies violence, because exoticism is tied to consumption. And every time we consume something, we need to look at the power dynamics involved.

An example of this was an article in the NY Times that came out earlier in October. It reported on the suicide of a Chinese sex worker named Song Yang. The first two lines were:

“A woman began to fall. With her long dark hair in a ponytail and her black-and-red scarf loose around her neck, she is plummeting from a fourth-floor balcony, through the neon charged November night.”

This is not how you should describe the death of a woman in a piece of reporting. And even if it were a piece of fiction, it should be challenged. Why? This is what we’re here to talk about.

Let me introduce you to our panelists. Kirin, Grace, Misha and Audrey. Thank you for joining me here today. I will go over everyone’s bio briefly, and then we will start the discussion. We will leave 10-15 minutes at the end of the panel for a Q&A.
Panelist Icebreaker and Initial Remarks
What piece of “exotic” writing has angered you this year, or made you laugh out loud? Each panelist will give us a very brief example.

Moderator Questions
1. What does exotic mean? Overview of definitions by moderator (2-3 minutes)
2. Each panelist will tell us a little about their work. Is exoticism something you contend with in your writing? Do you worry about it?
3. How do you write about the Other? Why are you writing from the Other’s perspective?
4. What is the difference, to you, between exoticizing something, and being open-minded to someone else’s culture?
5. Sensitivity Readers. What are your thoughts? To be encouraged? Or is it limiting our craft?

Q&A
We will allocate 10-15 minutes to questions from the floor. If none are asked, the moderator will introduce a new question.

Closing remarks
Thank you to everyone who came to listen to our conversation today. Thank you to our panelists.

I hope this was a useful discussion on the challenges of writing about cultures outside our own. We are writers, it is part of our work description to imagine the lives of others. Write about whoever you want to write about. But this comes with responsibilities, because not all of us have the privilege of being published or read widely. Only some of us will be given a platform. In a scarcity model, we cannot be everything to everyone in each of our community. But at the very least, we can try to stop the dissemination of bad, colonialist writing. Thank you.