

# Denise Kumani Gantt

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## ARTISTIC WORK

### ORIGINAL THEATRICAL WORKS

#### **The Gift, a brief history of everything we have ever known**

- Chase Arts, staged reading at Cape May Stage 2014
- Drama League, reading 2012
- ACT Theater, staged reading 2011

#### **Testament 2006**

- Devised theater work based on oral histories, premiered at Tomlinson Theater, Temple University
- Inspired by *Antigone*, created for the Village of Arts and Humanities

#### **Siren**

- Philadelphia Fringe Festival 2006
- Art Sanctuary 2005

#### **Communion (co-written with Vanessa Thomas) 2004**

- Horizons Theatre, Washington, DC

#### **anatomy/lessons**

- Cornerstone Project selection, Penumbra Theatre 2002
- Baltimore Theatre Project & Living Stage 2001

#### **Under the Veil of St. Theresa**

- *Sistah Soutlice*, Joe's Movement Emporium 2000
- *Juxtapositions*, Maryland Institute College of Art 2000
- Baltimore Theater Project 1999

## **For Love 1999**

- Collaborative work with Shozo Sato, Juanita Rockwell, Rohaizad Suaidi, and Roberta Gasbarre
- Towson University

## **Three Stories to the Ground (co-written with Gabriel Shanks)**

- New York International Fringe Festival 1998
- Baltimore Theater Project 1998

## **meditations/from the ash**

- Baltimore Theater Project 1998
- ARTSCAPE97 1997

## **Hunger**

- Baltimore Theatre Project 1997

## **SOLO PERFORMANCE WORKS**

### **Eve's Lament**

- Lekhana Literary Festival, Bangalore, India 2013
- Cape May Stage, New Jersey 2012

### **Poetry + Motion**

- Seattle, WA 2012

### **Anonymous Requiem 2002**

- Stevenson College (response to 9/11)

### **angels & illusions 2002**

- Multi-disciplinary performance with visual artist Peter Bruun
- Stevenson College

## **NOTABLE PERFORMANCES & READINGS**

- Kennedy Center Millennium Stage with poet Dolores Kendrick 2002
- *Caroline or Change* by Tony Kushner, staged reading directed by Tony Kushner, Jewish Community Center of Washington 1998
- *Till the Break of Dawn* by Danny Hoch, Center Stage 2002

## **PUBLICATIONS**

"A Coil Called Skin" **Malpais Review** 2013

*Evoking Spirit, Embracing Memory Catalog* 2009

- Exhibition catalog, Village of Arts and Humanities
- Pew Center for the Arts

*conjuring the dead* 2003

- Full-length poetry collection, WordHouse Press
- Maryland Emerging Voices Award winner, judged by Afaa Michael Weaver

*Norcroft 10th Anniversary Chapbook* 2002

- Featured work: *war*

## **HONORS & AWARDS**

### **Poetry Awards**

- Finalist, 49th Parallel Award for Poetry, The Bellingham Review 2012 (*Recipe for Hoppin' John, New Year 2010*)
- Maryland Emerging Voices Award 2003 (*conjuring the dead*)

### **Theater Awards**

- Cornerstone Project selection, Penumbra Theatre 2002 (*anatomy/lessons*)
- Visionary Award, Baltimore Theatre Project 1998 (*three stories to the ground*)
- Best New Play, *The Baltimore Alternative*, Baltimore City Paper 1997 (*meditations/from the ash*)
- Best New One Act Play, Artscape 1997 (*meditations/from the ash*)

### **Fellowship**

- National Endowment for the Arts Fellow, MacDowell Colony 2013

## **PRESTIGIOUS ARTIST RESIDENCIES**

### **International Residencies**

- Fiskars Village Artist Residency, Finland March 2013
- Sangam House, Bangalore, India January 2013

## **National Residencies MacDowell Colony (NEA Fellow), New Hampshire Spring 2013**

- Worked on *The Gift* in the historic Veltin studio, previously used by playwright Thornton Wilder (who finished *Our Town* there in 1937) and poet Edwin Arlington Robinson
  - The Studios of Key West, Florida December 2013
  - Millay Colony, New York November 2013
  - Writers OMI, New York September 2013
  - Evans Contemporary, Ontario July 2013
  - Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico October 2012
  - Blue Mountain Center, New York July 2012
  - Playa, Oregon February 2012
  - Hedgebrook Writers Retreat, Washington August 2011, July 1998
  - Centrum Artist Retreat, Washington June 2011
  - Caldera Artist Retreat, Oregon January 2006
  - Norcroft Writers Retreat, Minnesota July 2001
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## **LEADERSHIP & EXECUTIVE EXPERIENCE**

### **CURRENT POSITION**

**Director of Education** 2018 - Present

**Lyric Baltimore**, Baltimore, MD

Transformed education department to focus on theater-based programming supporting the voice, agency, and creativity of Baltimore area youth in grades 5th through 12th. Supervise one full-time staff member and manage 10 independent contractors.

### **Key Achievements:**

- **Created the Dream Big Contest** - Annual arts competition where Baltimore City and County students present original works based on their dreams for a better world
- **Executive Producer, Dream Big Contest 2024 Broadcast** - Produced televised showcase on WBAL-TV featuring student performances from Lyric Baltimore
- **Program Innovation** - Revamped education programming to be theater and writing-based, providing acting and theater training where participants write and perform original theatrical works
- **Student Impact** - Mentored students beyond traditional programming, supporting initiatives like "SparkED," a student-founded 501(c)3 nonprofit focused on college readiness
- **Mission Leadership** - Established departmental mission to support the voice and agency of Baltimore area youth through arts education

## PREVIOUS POSITIONS

### **Program Assistant** 2016 - 2018

#### **Second Chance for Women**, Baltimore, MD

Designed and facilitated transformative life story writing workshops for incarcerated women, supporting rehabilitation and successful reentry through narrative therapy and creative expression.

### **Transformational Leaders Inaugural Cohort** 2013

#### **Sojourner Truth Leadership Circle**, Auburn Seminary

Selected as one of 12 Black women leaders nationwide for intensive 8-month program exploring prophetic leadership and sustainable activism.

### **Executive Director** 2009 - 2011

#### **Central District Forum for Arts and Ideas**, Seattle, WA

Led established arts organization presenting provocative work examining Black culture and social justice.

- Programmed renowned artists including Pulitzer Prize winner Isabel Wilkerson (*The Warmth of Other Suns*), Terry McMillan (*Getting Happy*), and Michele Norris (*The Grace of Silence*)
- Secured Marc Bamuthi Joseph's *red, black, and GREEN: a blues* for Seattle Center's 50th anniversary
- Managed 3 staff and 12-member board
- Developed strategic partnerships with Amazon and Medtronic

### **Artistic and Executive Director** 2004 - 2009

#### **Village of Arts and Humanities**, Philadelphia, PA

Led nationally recognized community arts organization utilizing multimedia storytelling, public art, and environmental justice for neighborhood transformation.

- Conceived and executed *Bearing Witness: Celebrating the Stories of North Philadelphia* for organization's 20th anniversary
- Created *Testament*, community-based theater work from oral histories
- Developed *COIL*, innovative teen theater collaboration with Liz Lerman Dance Exchange
- Partnered with Ping Chong & Co. for *Undesirable Elements* production
- Secured \$177,000 Philadelphia Exhibition Initiative grant for *Evoking Spirit/Embracing Memory* public art exhibition
- Obtained Ford Foundation *Artography* initiative funding
- Managed 11 employees and 8-member board

### **Education Director and Associate Producer** 1999 - 2000

#### **Arena Stage**, Washington, DC

Developed groundbreaking education program *Creating Art through Play* and oversaw Living Stage Theatre, adult programs, and professional development initiatives.

- Led season planning team
- Managed 15-person staff and board committee
- Cultivated education donors and stakeholders

**Center Stage, Baltimore, MD 1988 - 2004**

*Director, Theater for a New Generation (1995-1999, 2000-2001)*

- Managed \$1.4 million Wallace Foundation initiative
- Created award-winning education and outreach programming
- Curated *Origins* new play series featuring emerging writers
- Designed signature events with Angela Davis, Taylor Branch, Anna Deveare Smith, and Dr. Ysaye Maria Barnwell

*Program Director (2001-2002)*

- Led *Recasting the Circle, Coming Up Taller* Award semifinalist teen program exploring race and identity through Holocaust drama *The Investigation*

*Associate Director of Development (1990-1994)*

- Managed comprehensive fundraising program serving 2,500+ donors
- Launched Center Stage Society major donor program

**Consultant 2002 - 2004**

**Fusion Partnerships, Baltimore, MD**

Specialized in conflict resolution and anti-racism dialogue facilitation, co-developing *Bridging Baltimore* racial equity series.

## TEACHING & PEDAGOGY

### ACADEMIC POSITIONS

**Adjunct Playwriting Professor**  
**Coppin State University**

**Adjunct Instructor 2001-2002**  
**Goucher College, Towson, MD**  
*Race & Racism* - Freshman core curriculum

### COMMUNITY-BASED TEACHING

**Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts 2003-2004**

Resident Artist developing poetry workshops introducing third-grade students to haiku and free verse fundamentals.

## **Correctional Institution Programming**

- State Correctional Institution at Graterford (2005-2007)
- Baltimore Women's Detention Center
- Maryland Correctional Institution for Women
- Power Inside

## **Social Justice Education**

- **The Rebecca Project for Human Rights** (2000-2003): Lead facilitator for creative writing workshops with mothers in drug rehabilitation
- **Baltimore City Public Schools** (2002): Community Arts Master Class for high school teachers

## **SPECIALIZED WORKSHOPS**

- Digital storytelling with StoryCentre Canada and StoryCenter
- Life narrative workshops for system-impacted women
- Trauma-informed creative writing pedagogy

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## **RECENT MEDIA & INTERVIEWS**

- **CityBiz Interview** (February 2025) - Featured interview with David Nevins discussing arts education leadership at Lyric Baltimore

## **DIGITAL MEDIA & CONTEMPORARY PROJECTS**

**Ten Thousand Seeds** - Ongoing multimedia storytelling project combining gardening, narrative, and community engagement ([tenthousandseeds.com](http://tenthousandseeds.com), [@tenthousandseeds](https://www.instagram.com/tenthousandseeds))

**Digital Story: "Love Apple"** - Personal narrative film available on YouTube platform

## **EDUCATION**

**Master of Fine Arts, Theatre** 2007  
Towson University, Maryland

**Bachelor of Arts, Political Science/Urban Affairs** 1983  
Goucher College, Maryland

# **PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP & BOARD SERVICE**

## **CURRENT APPOINTMENTS**

- Board Member, Maryland Citizens for the Arts (Events Committee)
- Leadership Council, CityLit Project
- Co-facilitator, CityLit Studio VIII with poet Rio Cortez (Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts)
- BAEI Advisory Committee
- Urban Arts Leadership Council
- Member, Alternate ROOTS (2013-present)

## **Selection & Curatorial Experience**

- Selection Committee, Writers OMI 2014
- Panelist, Artist Trust Innovator Award, Seattle 2011

## **Founding Leadership**

- Founding Board Member, Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance (2002-2004)
- Founding Member, Medusa Speaks! Artists Collective (2001-2003)

## **Previous Board Service**

- Board Member, Poetry + Motion, Seattle (2012-2014)
- Board Member, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance (2006-2009)
- Steering Committee, Arts 4 Youth Initiative, Philadelphia (2007-2009)

## **Professional Development**

- Sojourner Truth Leadership Circle, Auburn Seminary (2013)
- Executive Program for Nonprofit Leadership, Arts, Stanford Graduate School of Business (2007)
- TED Conference attendee, Long Beach (2010)
- Associate Artist, Baltimore Theatre Project (1997-2000)