

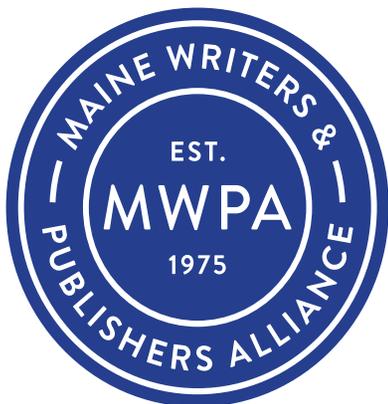
# August 25, 2021

## Gilsland Farm

Family Art Making	5 PM
Introductions in The Orchard	6 PM
A Reading by Samaa Abdurraqib	
Time to Walk	6:20 PM
Readings by Maya Williams & Myronn Hardy & by Arisa White & Ian-Khara Ellasante	6:30 PM
Time to Walk	6:50 PM
A Second Reading	7 PM

This event was made possible by the partnership of Maine Audubon, the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance, and the Portland Museum of Art. All of the poems included in this program are inspired by the exhibition *David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History*, which is on view at the Portland Museum of Art through September 12, 2021. Huge thanks to the five poets for their time, attention, and poetic responses to David Driskell's works.

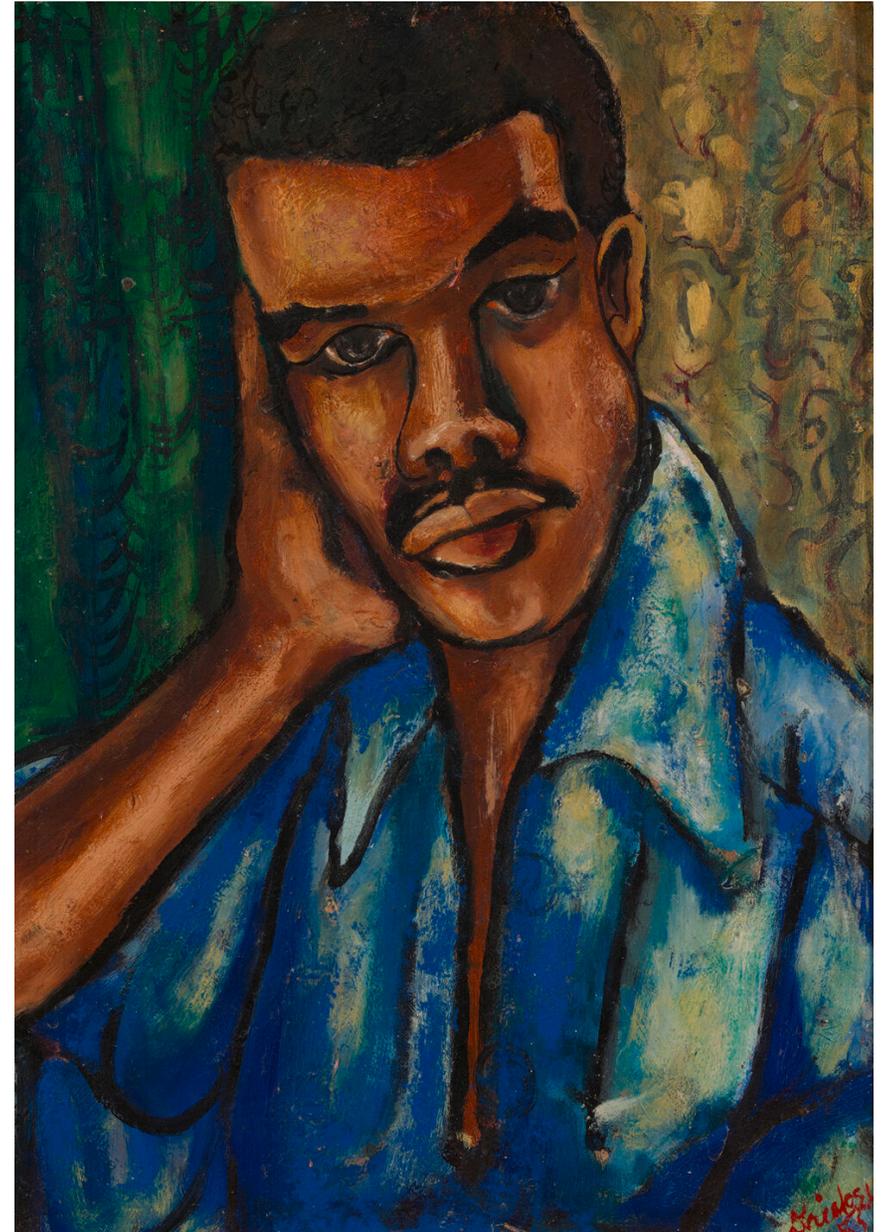
MAINE   
AUDUBON



PORTLAND MUSEUM of ART

Cover Image: David C. Driskell (United States, 1931–2020), *Self-Portrait*, 1953, oil on board, 15 1/4 x 11 inches. Collection of the Estate of David C. Driskell, Maryland. Photograph by Luc Demers.  
© Estate of David C. Driskell, courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York

## In the Shadow of a Pine: Black Poets from Maine Respond to David Driskell



## IAN-KHARA ELLASANTE

behold my son

after David Driskell's *Behold Thy Son*, 1956

behold the true american son  
and grant him his birthright  
red white and blue contusing his broken torso  
breaking open his arms

the rightful son of this nation behold him  
as dead as the eyes of mississippi justice  
bulging tongue choked from his mouth  
gouged eye at rest upon his bloated cheek

hell unfurls among the cypress trees  
from barn rafters turned crucifix  
what gilded liturgy is this  
his blood-drenched torture

hell crosses a night and brings a last day  
dark fear the road to calvary  
and the tallahatchie river closes over him  
for three days like a shroud

behold the son  
*behold my son* the weeping mother said  
*see what they did to my baby* behold  
the weary stigmata he bears he is still

a Black son the american Black boy but  
*he is mine* she said and does she  
kiss the shattered face the dead flesh  
she birthed

he is ours but whose placid faces  
does his shadow darken into whose arms  
is the torn Black body lain  
whose hands are these

that claim him that bear him  
that hoist him that throw him  
that drag him to the bottom of a river  
that raise him up again

Ian-Khara Ellasante (they/them) is a Black, queer, trans-nonbinary poet and cultural studies scholar. Winner of the 49th New Millennium Award for Poetry, Ian Khara's poems have appeared in *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics*, *The Feminist Wire*, *The Volta*, *Hinchas de Poesía*, and elsewhere. With abiding affection for their hometown of Memphis, Ian-Khara has also loved living and writing in Tucson, Brooklyn, and most recently, in southern Maine, where they are an assistant professor of gender and sexuality studies at Bates College.

## MYRONN HARDY

To Reach

"Thank God for the pines."--David Driskell

To see the world here from  
here that height.  
Boughs of green holding

everything that makes us what we  
are what we could be should.  
For what does a pine reach?

To know?  
To unknow?  
This as hummingbirds search

for syrup from wild bright blossoms.  
This as a woman collects evening  
primrose echinacea lavender chamomile.

This as a woman whispers heal.  
Boughs as if birds green large  
perhaps of prey that rest see

the moon among pines.  
That mutual knowing sudden still.  
What we know from stillness can save.

Myronn Hardy (he/him) is the author of five books of poems: *Approaching the Center*, winner of the PEN/Oakland Josephine Miles Award, *The Headless Saints*, winner of the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, *Catastrophic Bliss*, winner of the Griot-Stadler Prize for poetry, *Kingdom*, and most recently, *Radioactive Starlings*, published by Princeton University Press (2017). His poems have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Baffler*, *Rhino*, and elsewhere. He teaches poetry at Bates College.

## MAYA WILLIAMS

### Ekphrasis of David Driskell's *Pines at Night, II* and More

*My partner and I once strolled along a trail in Freeport and came across a tree split down its middle, most likely from previous lightning, leaning against another tree. The other tree, with its sturdy roots gripping the depths of the soil for dear life, I thought, provided a daily mantra to its sibling.*

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"I got you.  
If you go down,  
I go down with you."

---

David Driskell developed  
a specific fascination  
for pine trees.

Organisms  
with more faces  
than any human

can ever amount to.  
As David processed the pines'  
jagged leaves

blowing air  
kisses to the blue-black  
night sky, staring

at the slight  
bright moon,  
how often

did he get to see  
them hold each other?  
How many faces

(continued)

through their bark  
in each transitional  
season made him think

to explore  
the two faces  
he was capable of?

Did he ever tell  
the archangel, Gabriel,  
to tell the pines

his thankfulness  
for their service  
so he can provide

his service  
to fellow humans?  
The humans

left behind  
driving, biking, strolling  
past plethora of trees?

Maya Williams (she/hers, they/them, and ey/em) is a religious queer Black Mixed Race suicide survivor and was recently named the Poet Laureate of Portland. Their poems have appeared in many publications including the *Maine Sunday Telegram*, *Frost Meadow Review*, and *glitterMOB*. She graduated with a Masters in Social Work and Certificate in Applied Arts and Social Justice at the University of New England in 2018. She is currently in Randolph College's low residency MFA for Creative Writing.

## ARISA WHITE

### "Water Stones"

I'm inching towards  
my own troubled waters,  
rough and perfect seas,  
calm and shining  
where there the edges  
stick out, the lye reveals  
nature pulled between  
what's good and bad,  
where the land calls  
my bluff, shows how long  
I've dragged that baggage  
dented, zippers broke,  
tears duct-taped and tolerated,  
dulled by a story  
I can't move to another plot—  
its distractive ability  
to keep me untrue—  
a sorry "me" right  
at the end of "blame,"  
lighting up the most  
incurable bull.

A native New Yorker, Arisa White (she/hers, ma'am) is an assistant professor in English and Creative Writing at Colby College and serves on the board of directors for Foglifter and Nomadic Press. She is also an advisory board member for Gertrude and a community advisory board member for Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance. Arisa co-authored, with Laura Atkins, *Biddy Mason Speaks Up*, a middle-grade biography in verse that was awarded the Maine Literary Award for Young People's Literature, Nautilus Book Award Gold Medal for Middle-Grade Nonfiction, and the Independent Publisher Book Awards Silver Medal for Multicultural Juvenile Nonfiction. Her current publications are the poetic memoir *Who's Your Daddy* and the anthology *Home is Where You Queer Your Heart*, co-edited with Miah Jeffra and Monique Mero and published by Foglifter Press.

## SAMAA ABDURRAQIB

### When the Painter Paints a Pine

*“I gravitated toward the pine tree because the pine trees don’t talk back, they’re just trees waving in the wind” –David Driskell*

It’s strange to think that Weymouth saw what you saw when he traveled to the Land of the First Sun to strip it of its density and its thickness in the name of liberation.

*Pinus Strobus*

Fit for a king.  
Top of its class.  
Head and shoulders about the rest.

Afterwards, they came in droves, descended in Biblical proportions. Sawmills standing in clearings by the middle of the century. Earmarked for the crown.

What all did they ask  
of these pines?

How can we make your strength our own?  
How can we possess your diameters?  
How can we hollow you out?  
How can we live inside you?  
How can we make you a vessel  
To carry brown bodies?  
How can we break you apart  
To arm us as we fight the small battles  
On this land that is not ours?

If these trees could talk back  
What stories would they tell?

-----

When the painter paints a pine tree, he paints the fullness of it.  
The flat side of the brush of it. The geometrics of it.  
Pulling forward every color of the canopy,  
blotting out the knobby trunks.  
Not to say they’re not important – just to say,  
“there is more here than simply masts on stumps.”

When the painter paints a pine tree, he paints the light.  
Sharp angles holding sun shining through  
or moon light dappled on softer boughs.  
All lightness that elevates and venerates the stand,  
feathery limbs waving upwards as if to say,  
“we are sacred – we hold the light in our arms.”

When the painter paints a pine tree, he paints past plunder.

He paints beyond numbered time and eras,  
towards the eternal and everlasting.  
He paints in lines that intersect curves,  
a dizzying joining that feels untraceable,  
that feels expansive like a chest inhaling deeply.

When the painter paints a pine tree,  
his subjects come to life in the wind,  
in the light, beneath Frost and Ice,  
under the moon, and in the Blue  
of the Night.

When the painter paints a pine tree again and again,  
stretching out across canvases, ad infinitum,  
he manifests a resurrection.

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What do these boughs offer you, David?  
If they could talk  
If they could sing

Would they griot?

**Samaa Abdurraqib** (she/hers) taught at Bowdoin College, transitioned into the non-profit world in 2013, and currently serves as Associate Director at the Maine Humanities Council. She enjoys birding, hiking and being outdoors, and coaching leaders of color. Samaa loves Black and Brown and Queer and Trans people. Samaa’s poems can be found most recently in *Enough! Poems of Resistance and Protest* (Littoral Press, 2020) and her chapbook *Each Day Is Like an Anchor* (A Clearing, 2020).