

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 29, 2024

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Image by Leah L. Jones, Photographer, National Museum of African American History & Culture, Smithsonian Institution.

THE OFFICE FOR THE ARTS ANNOUNCES POET AND MUSEUM DIRECTOR KEVIN YOUNG '92 AS THE 2024 HARVARD ARTS MEDALIST

Acclaimed poet, scholar and director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture will receive the Harvard Arts Medal from Interim President Alan Garber on April 24, 2024, at a public ceremony at Harvard University, kicking off Harvard's ARTS FIRST Festival. Admission to Harvard Arts Medal ceremony is free. Open to all. Doors open at 4:30 p.m. Ceremony starts at 5 p.m. This event will be livestreamed and captioned on the [HarvardArts YouTube](#) channel.

(Cambridge, MA)—The Office for the Arts at Harvard announces prize-winning poet and visionary museum director **Kevin Young '92** as the recipient of the 2024 Harvard Arts Medal, which will be awarded by Harvard University Interim President **Alan Garber** at a celebratory ceremony **5 p.m. Wednesday, April 24, 2024**, at Lowell Lecture Hall, 24 Quincy St., Cambridge. The ceremony, which is free and open to the public, is presented by the Office for the Arts at Harvard, in partnership with the Harvard Department of English. The ceremony is also the official opening of [ARTS FIRST](#), Harvard University's annual festival showcasing the creativity of students, faculty, staff and university affiliates in the arts. Additional speakers at the event will include **Jack Megan**, Director of the Office for the Arts; **Tracy K. Smith '94**, Professor of English and of African and African American Studies, the Susan S. and Kenneth L. Wallach Professor at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, and Interim Director of Creative Writing; **Jorie Graham**, Boylston Professor of Oratory and Rhetoric; **Brenda Tindal**, Chief Campus Curator for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences; and undergraduate poetry students.

"Each year, Harvard and the Office for the Arts honors a Harvard graduate who has achieved distinction in the arts and whose career serves as an inspiration to aspiring undergraduate artists," said Jack Megan. "Kevin Young strides two important fields of artistic expression. He is a celebrated poet, author, essayist and editor, and the Andrew W. Mellon Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. The Harvard Arts Medal celebrates both roles as vital to the fabric of community life."

After earning his bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1992, Young held a Stegner Fellowship in Poetry at Stanford University (1992–1994) and received his Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from Brown University in 1996. A former Guggenheim Fellow, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2016 and was named a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

Young, widely considered a leading voice of poetry for his generation, is the author of 15 books of poetry and prose, most recently *Stones*, shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize; *Blue Laws: Selected & Uncollected Poems 1995-2015*, longlisted for the National Book Award; and *Emile and The Field*, named one of the best children's books of 2022 by the *New York Times*. His nonfiction book *Bunk* was also longlisted for the National Book Award, a finalist for the National Book Critics Award for criticism and named on many "best of" lists for 2017.

Young is poetry editor at the *New Yorker* and editor of nine poetry volumes, most recently the acclaimed anthology *African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle & Song*.

"Kevin Young is a poet of many vernaculars: the intimate languages springing up among kin, around food, within music and movies and visual art," said Tracy K. Smith, who was the 2017-2019 U.S. Poet Laureate. "Importantly, he also draws us into a courageous intimacy with languages we'd otherwise fear or shun: the vocabulary of loss and grief, the known names of dangers we'd rather relegate to 'history.' In his peerless poetry and critical prose—and via his leadership of some of America's most consequential cultural institutions—Young models a passionate citizenship and a devoted stewardship of the American imagination."

During his four-year tenure as director of the Schomburg Center, a research division of the New York Public Library, Young secured several high-profile acquisitions, including the Harlem-based archives of Harry Belafonte, James Baldwin, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Sonny Rollins, Fred "Fab 5 Freddy" Brathwaite and the manuscript of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, including a once-lost chapter. In addition to raising \$10 million in grants and donations and raising attendance by 40 percent, Young enhanced the entire profile of the Schomburg Center, developing the "Home to Harlem" initiative, the new Schomburg Center Literary Festival and continuing the popular Black Comic Book Festival. While closed for the pandemic, the Schomburg Center developed a Black Liberation Reading List with 95 books and affiliated programs.

Before joining the Schomburg Center, Young was the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Creative Writing and English at Emory University in Atlanta where he taught for 11 years. He also was the curator of Emory's Raymond Danowski Poetry Library, a 75,000-volume collection of rare and modern poetry, and curator of literary collections. He has produced a wide range of poetry and cultural criticism, including the nonfiction books, *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts and Fake News* (Graywolf Press, 2017), longlisted for the National Book Award, and *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (Graywolf Press, 2012), which won the PEN Open Book Award and was named a *New York Times* Notable Book.

"As a prolific writer, esteemed poet-scholar, and leader of one of our nation's most sacred and profoundly important museum institutions, Kevin Young is at once a prized 'keeper' of culture and a national treasure," said Brenda Tindal, who was previously Executive Director of the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture.

The **National Museum of African American History and Culture** opened in 2016. Located next to the Washington Monument, the 400,000-square-foot museum is the nation's largest and

most comprehensive cultural center devoted exclusively to exploring, documenting and showcasing the African American experience. The museum has a collection of over 37,000 objects, with about 3,000 on display. Highlights include artifacts belonging to Harriet Tubman, including her shawl and hymnal, Emmett Till's casket, a slave cabin from Edisto Island, South Carolina, and a Jim Crow-era railroad car. The museum has more than 10,000 digitized objects and collection stories online.

The **Harvard Arts Medal** honors a distinguished Harvard or Radcliffe graduate or faculty member who has achieved excellence in the arts and has made a contribution through the arts to education or the public good. Previous Medal recipients include musician/composer Rubén Blades LLM '85; architect Frank Gehry GSD '57 ArD '00; choreographer Damian Woetzel MPA '07; saxophonist/composers Joshua Redman '91 and Fred Ho '79; composer John Adams '69 MA '72; cellist Yo-Yo Ma '76; film director Mira Nair '79; conductor and founder of Les Arts Florissants William Christie '66; stage director Peter Sellars '80; composer John Harbison '60; National Theatre of the Deaf founder David Hays '52; songwriter/musicians Bonnie Raitt '72 and Pete Seeger '40; actors Jack Lemmon '47, Tommy Lee Jones '69, Matt Damon '92 and John Lithgow '67 ArD '05, conceptual artist/philosopher Adrian Margaret Smith Piper AM '77, PhD '81; photographer Susan Meiselas EdM '71; and visual artist/essayist Catherine Lord '70.

Young joins poet Tracy K. Smith '94, novelist Colson Whitehead '91, playwright Christopher Durang '71, novelist Margaret Atwood AM '62, Litt.D. '04, novelist John Updike '54, poet John Ashbery '49 and poet Maxine Kumin '46 as a recipient of the medal in recognition of contributions to literary arts. Young is the first museum director to receive the medal.

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The **Office for the Arts at Harvard** supports student engagement in the arts and integrates the arts into university life. Through its programs and services, the OFA teaches and mentors, fosters student art making, connects students to accomplished artists, commissions new work, and partners with local, national and international constituencies. By supporting the development of students as artists and cultural stewards, the OFA works to enrich society and shape communities in which the arts are a vital part of life. The OFA programming team hosts visits with world-class professional artists who interact with students through a range of educational forums, many open to the public. Information: 617.495.8676, ofa@fas.harvard.edu, ofa.fas.harvard.edu.