



Artists Repertory Theatre

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## **E.M. LEWIS AWARDED THE MELLON FOUNDATION PLAYWRIGHT RESIDENCY AT ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE**

**E.M. Lewis's groundbreaking residency continues through 2026**

**PORTLAND, OREGON – July 17, 2023** Local and renowned playwright and Resident Artist, E.M. Lewis has been awarded another three years of the Mellon Foundation Playwright Residency at Artists Repertory Theatre. The grant recognizes Lewis' outstanding contribution to the theatrical arts and provides a platform for continued development and production of *The Great Divide* – a co-commission by Artists Rep and Oregon Shakespeare Festival's American Revolutions program.

"This national honor from the Mellon Foundation recognizes a visionary artist based in rural Oregon. E.M. Lewis crafts form-bending work that is transformative, and we are beyond fortunate that she is close enough to collaborate with us at Artists Rep," says **Artistic Director Jeanette Harrison**. "My hope is this residency will enable Artists Rep to inaugurate one of the new stages in our Morrison Street home with the world premiere of *The Great Divide*."

Artists Rep's home at 1515 SW Morrison is currently under construction. The final building will feature three state-of-the-art performance spaces.

This prestigious national grant represents a significant milestone in Lewis' career and further solidifies her position as a leading voice in playwriting. "I'm so grateful to the Mellon Foundation for three more years of funding through their National Playwright Residency Program (NPRP), and to Artists Rep for giving this playwright a home!" says **E.M. Lewis**. "In spite of the pandemic and all the shifts and changes in the world, the last three years of support from the NPRP has helped me to flourish — creating new work and dreaming bigger than ever before, with Artists Rep and with other theaters across the country. I can't wait to see what we can accomplish together in the next three years!"

As a Mellon resident, she and Artists Rep will continue to work toward a production-ready draft of the script for *The Great Divide*, including workshopping the project with actors.

"Ellen's plays usually fall into two main types," says **Director of New Works, Luan Schooler**, "There are intimate, character-driven works that focus on the intricacies of human relationships, and big, idea-driven, epic works that wrestle with political and cultural complexity. We are thrilled to support her explorations, whether by producing *True Story*, her noir-ish examination of the messy, messy human

heart, or *Magellanica*, her 5-hour Antarctic epic we produced in 2018. *The Great Divide* is shaping up to be a thrilling, theatrical, open heart surgery on our divided country.”

The Mellon Foundation awards grants to actively support the visionaries and communities that unlock the power in the arts and humanities that helps connect everyone. Since becoming the Mellon Playwright in Residence at ART in 2020, Ellen has worked on projects here in our community, and cultivated relationships with theaters across the country. With the support of the residency, she was able to do a five-week teaching residency with Fishtrap: Writers and the West, offering playwriting workshops to students at four different high schools in three remote rural communities in the northeastern corner of Oregon. She also worked with The Red Door Project, a Portland-based social justice initiative, researching and writing two monologues that were subsequently filmed and used to facilitate conversations by the National Center for State Courts and other organizations. She was the host playwright for the Ashland New Plays Festival’s Oregon playwright retreat. And as a new member of the Dramatists Guild’s Opera Committee, she spearheaded a conversation series entitled “Operatunity!” to encourage and support emerging opera librettists from all parts of the country, backgrounds, races, languages, and identities.”

### **Current and Future Projects**

Co-commissioned by Artists Rep and Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s American Revolutions program in 2019, *The Great Divide* was inspired by the 2016 occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge by anti-government extremists, and grapples with the political and ideological forces that are tearing this country apart.

**Strange Birds** (new play in development) in [Launch Pad](#) at University of California, Santa Barbara in Santa Barbara, CA — July 24-27, 2023. With ART Director of New Works, Luan Schooler as dramaturg.

[La MaMa International Playwright Retreat](#) in Umbria, Italy, with Chay Yew — August 10-20, 2023.

**Dorothy’s Dictionary** (play) at [Washington Stage Guild](#) in Washington, DC — September 29 - October 22, 2023.

**In the Deep** (new musical with composer Clarence Roscoe McDonald) at [Willamette University](#) in Salem, OR — October 26 - November 12. With costume design by ART Resident Artist and WU faculty member Bobby Brewer-Wallin.

**Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Fallen Giant** (world premiere opera with composer Evan Meier) at [Opera Modesto](#) in Modesto, CA — January 13-14, 2024

Lewis’ remarkable storytelling has captivated audiences across the nation, with productions all over the world. The Mellon Foundation residency will further amplify her impact on the theater community and is a testament to her exceptional talent and dedication. Artists Rep is excited to embark on this next chapter of Lewis’ career and eagerly anticipates the new work that will emerge from the residency.

### **ABOUT E.M. Lewis**

E. M. Lewis (she/her) is an award-winning playwright, teacher, and opera librettist. Her work has been produced around the world, and published by Samuel French. Lewis received the Steinberg Award for both *How the Light Gets In* and *Song of Extinction*, and the Primus Prize for *Heads* from the American Theater Critics Association, the Ted Schmitt Award from the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle for

outstanding writing of a world premiere play, a Hodder Fellowship from Princeton University, a playwriting fellowship from the New Jersey State Arts Commission, the 2016 Oregon Literary Fellowship in Drama, and an Edgerton Award for her epic Antarctic play *Magellanica*.

Plays by Lewis include: *How the Light Gets In* (winner of the Steinberg Award, and a semi-finalist for the O'Neill, that premiered at Boston Court Pasadena), *Apple Season* (which received a rolling world premiere from the National New Play Network in 2019), *The Gun Show* (which has had more than forty productions across the country and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland), *Infinite Black Suitcase*, *Reading to Vegetables*, *True Story*, *Dorothy's Dictionary*, and *You Can See All the Stars* (a play for college students commissioned by the Kennedy Center). *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Fallen Giant*, a new opera commissioned by American Lyric Theater that Lewis is working on with composer Evan Meier, had an orchestral workshop in New York City in February 2020. *Town Hall*, her opera about healthcare in America, created with composer Theo Popov, was produced at University of Maryland and Willamette University.

Lewis is currently working on a big, new play called *The Great Divide*, commissioned by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival as part of their American Revolutions program. The play was co-commissioned by Artists Repertory Theater, and Lewis has received a three-year National Playwright Residency from the Mellon Foundation to support her work with them. Lewis is a proud member of LineStorm Playwrights and the Dramatists Guild. She is represented by Samara Harris at the Michael Moore Agency. She lives on her family's farm in Oregon.

#### **ABOUT ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE**

[ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE'S \(Artists Rep or ART\)](#) mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for a diverse community of artists and audiences to take creative risks. Artists Rep (est. 1982) is Portland's oldest professional theatre company and has become a significant presence in the U.S. regional theatre with a legacy of world, national, and regional premieres of provocative new work with the highest standards of stagecraft. In 2016, ART became the 72<sup>nd</sup> member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN). Plays developed by ART have subsequently been produced in New York, Chicago, London, and throughout the country. Recognition for ART developed plays includes the Dramatists Guild Foundation Award, the Edgerton New Play Award, NEA Funding, the Mellon Foundation National Playwright Residency Program, American Theatre Magazine's Most-Produced Plays, and coverage in the New Yorker and the New York Times. In 2021, the Oregon Media Production Association (OMPA) honored Artists Rep with the Creative Innovation Award for the company's pivot to digital mediums in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. ART recognizes that we are a predominately white organization and operate within systemic racism and oppression, and that silence and neutrality are actions of complicity. We commit ourselves to the work of becoming an anti-racism and anti-oppression organization, and will [work with urgency](#) to end racial inequities in our industry and our culture. To learn more about our organization and programs, please visit <https://artistsrep.org/about/>

#### **ABOUT THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION**

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be

found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at [mellon.org](https://mellon.org).