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Democracy Center Announces the Second Annual Irene Yamamoto Fellowship for Emerging Arts Writers of Color

LOS ANGELES, CA – The Daniel K. Inouye National Center for the Preservation of Democracy (Democracy Center) at the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) announces the second annual Irene Yamamoto Arts Writers Fellowship (Yamamoto Fellowship) with a focus on theater, dance, and performance art. The fellowship encourages emerging arts writers of color to write about works from their own cultural and political perspectives, enriching and broadening cultural criticism as a practice and profession.

The Yamamoto Fellowship will focus on a different artistic discipline each year. Theater, dance, and performance art were selected for 2024 because these art forms are still struggling in the wake of setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Yamamoto Fellowship will award two \$5,000 unrestricted awards to two emerging arts writers of color who write critically about theater, dance, and/or performance art. Each writer will receive a \$5,000 award to be spent over six months. Submissions will be open from February 1 – March 18, 2024 and selections will be made in June 2024.

“This fellowship gives theater, dance, and/or performance art writers the power to fight erasure of contributions and accomplishments by people of color in America. It also gives them the opportunity to shape how art created by their own communities is represented today and throughout American art history. By highlighting their voices, this fellowship strengthens ties within diverse communities and expands public discourse around art,” said James E. Herr, director of the Democracy Center.

“This award serves as a vote of confidence for emerging writers, a way to say ‘keep going!’ despite the challenges they face. I received a similar award as a young art critic and it helped me to take myself more seriously as a writer and encouraged me to take bigger risks and grow. It also convinced me that there is an audience for arts writing that recognizes and supports social justice. I hope this fellowship rewards a writer’s potential as much or even more so than their previous accomplishments,” said Sharon Mizota, who funded the fellowship through a gift to honor her late aunt.

Eligible applicants must:

- reside in or be a citizen of the US
- be at least 18 years of age

- identify as a member of a community with ancestry in one of the original peoples of Africa, Asia, the Americas, Oceania, or Pacific Islands
- have less than 2 years of publication experience, which may include a blog or self-publishing
- have demonstrated a commitment to writing about theater, dance, or performance art

All eligible applications will be reviewed by a panel of professional writers and editors who cover the performing arts. More information will be available at janm.org/democracy.

The Irene Yamamoto Arts Writers Fellowship is made possible through a gift from Sharon Mizota to honor Irene Yamamoto. This project is also supported by Critical Minded, an initiative to invest in cultural critics of color cofounded by The Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

About Irene Yamamoto

Irene Yamamoto (1937 – 2020) was a lifelong lover of the arts. Born in Los Angeles, she was incarcerated with her family during World War II in Gila River, Arizona. Upon returning to Los Angeles, she attended UCLA and had a long career as a production artist for several design and advertising agencies. In her free time, she loved to draw, learn new languages, visit museums, and travel.

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About the Japanese American National Museum (JANM)

Established in 1985, JANM promotes understanding and appreciation of America's ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Japanese American experience. Located in the historic Little Tokyo district of downtown Los Angeles, JANM is a center for civil rights, ensuring that the hard-fought lessons of the World War II incarceration are not forgotten. A Smithsonian Affiliate and one of America's Cultural Treasures, JANM is a hybrid institution that straddles traditional museum categories. JANM is a center for the arts as well as history. It provides a voice for Japanese Americans and a forum that enables all people to explore their own heritage and culture. Since opening to the public in 1992, JANM has presented over 100 exhibitions onsite while traveling 40 exhibits to venues such as the Smithsonian Institution and the Ellis Island Museum in the United States, and to several leading cultural museums in Japan and South America. JANM is open on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday–Sunday from 11 a.m.–5 p.m. and on Thursday from 12 p.m.–8 p.m. JANM is free every third Thursday of the month. On all other Thursdays, JANM is free from 5 p.m.–8 p.m. For more information, visit janm.org or follow us on social media @jamuseum.

About the Daniel K. Inouye National Center for the Preservation of Democracy (Democracy Center)

The Democracy Center is a place where visitors can examine the Asian American experience, past and present, and talk about race, identity, social justice, and the shaping of democracy. It convenes and educates people of all ages about democracy to transform attitudes, celebrate culture, and promote civic engagement; educates and informs the public and public officials about important issues; creates strength within and among communities to advocate for positive change; and explores the values that shape American democracy. The Democracy Center looks for solutions that engage communities in self-advocacy, explore the evolving idea of what it means to be an American, and result in actions that bring everyone together.