

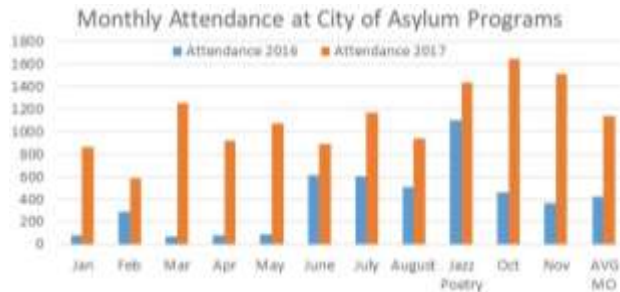


Please help us meet the challenge grants. They are the key to our future. We are so close! Details on page 5.

In 2016, when City of Asylum became the U.S. Headquarters for the International Cities of Refuge Network, Mayor Peduto predicted “What’s happening here is... a model is being developed...that is applicable all around the world.” And he was right. Since then, numerous organizations and government representatives have visited City of Asylum, to see how Pittsburgh defends and celebrates creative expression to build community.

December 27, 2017

Dear Friend of City of Asylum,



The launch of City of Asylum @ Alphabet City has greatly expanded our capacity to advance our mission. In it, Associate Director Silvia Duarte took over responsibility for programming. And she more than doubled the number of our literary readings, concerts, and films—from 66 to over 136.

Our audiences grew even faster, more than tripling ...to over 12,500 people—many of them new to us and from many different backgrounds. And this does not count participants in numerous community events, workshops, discussion groups, book clubs, and other uses of Alphabet City.

The first program in Alphabet City was a naturalization ceremony. In it Silvia received her U. S. citizenship. She also made the keynote speech. Silvia is in charge of our programming —both curating and production— and almost overnight she has made Alphabet City one of the most vibrant spaces in Pittsburgh.

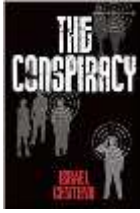


It was also a year of great personal growth for Silvia. She was chosen as a National Arts Strategies Fellow; and she also completed a year in Leadership Pittsburgh. To cap off the year, Leadership Pittsburgh last week selected Silvia as one of the 25 “high potential nonprofit leaders in Southwest Pennsylvania.”

In 2017 we again expanded our exiled writer-residency program. There are now 3 exiled writer-in-residence on Sampsonia Way—Israel Centeno, Tuhin Das, and Osama Alomrar.

—please turn page—

During the summer, Israel joined Silvia in becoming a U.S. citizen. And Phoneme Media, a leading publisher of translations, issued an English translation of *The Conspiracy*, the novel that led to his exile.



Regarded as the most important author from Venezuela in the past 75 years, Israel is now hard at work, writing a novel in English. His English is still imperfect. But rather than writing in Spanglish or using an editor to polish the text, he is incorporating the imperfections as part of the plot. The novel will be partly set in Pittsburgh, with some of the flavor derived from talking with patients at Allegheny General Hospital where he now works. Will this be the first Spanish-Yinzer novel?



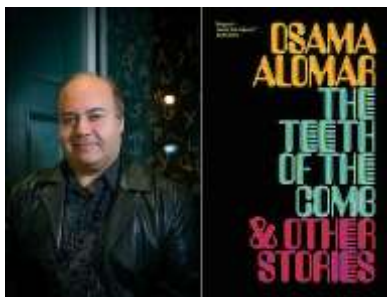
We also congratulate Israel and his wife Graciela on the graduation of their youngest daughter, Camila, from Chatham University. Mariana, their oldest daughter, graduated from there two years ago. And Diane and I received Honorary Doctorates there in 2011. Chatham has been a generous partner to City of Asylum and in changing the lives of the Centeno family.

Tuhin Das came to City of Asylum in 2016 from Bangladesh, where he survived five months in hiding under death threats from an Al Qaeda affiliate. Tuhin was featured in several segments of Voice of America, speaking about the importance of creative freedom. In 2017 he completed a novel that he began after coming to Pittsburgh. He also compiled a volume of his poetry, for which City of Asylum is now commissioning a translation.



Tuhin has a business degree and under the tutelage of Amy Gilligan, our Finance Manager, he has been learning U.S. bookkeeping. In January he will be starting a job in Pittsburgh as well as a new novel.

Osama Alomar came to City of Asylum in the Spring of 2017. After arriving, his new book of “flash fiction” was published in English translation by New Directions —to great acclaim in reviews by *The New York Times*, NPR, and *The New Yorker*. It is selling well nationally (and in City of Asylum Bookstore!), which has led to many invitations for Osama to read at universities across the country.



Osama has been re-writing a novel whose manuscript was lost in Syria before his exile and has also completed the first section of a new experimental “book of wisdom.”



In addition to the 3 current exiled writers-in-residence, we are now hoping to invite a 4th writer this spring. The International Cities of Refuge Network has sent us a group of recommended writers. All are from Muslim majority countries, and several are from countries subject to the proposed “travel ban.” This will be the first writer to come to City of Asylum since the “travel ban,” and we are obviously concerned.



Former exiled writers-in-residence are all doing well. Horacio Castellanos Moya is an Associate Professor at the University of Iowa in Creative Writing. *Revulsion*— his first novel, which was also the novel that led to death threats against him—has now been published in English translation by New Directions.



Yaghoub Yadali published several short stories and is hard at work on a new novel. He and his wife, Aki Kabiri, live in Amherst, Massachusetts, where Aki recently completed her M.A. in Islamic Art History, with plans to continue for a Ph.D. The translation that City of Asylum commissioned of Yaghoub’s novel *Rituals of Restless*, the novel that had led to his imprisonment in Iran, was published by Phoneme in late 2016. And it was acclaimed as one of the 7 contemporary Iranian novels most deserving of translation.



Khet Mar continues as a journalist at Radio Free Asia. In addition to reporting on American news for Burma, she roams the globe. You need a passport just to keep up with her on Facebook.

Her oldest son Wa Than is now in his second year of community college and plans to go to a university in media studies, and her youngest son Linn is now a junior in high school. They periodically come back to Pittsburgh to visit with friends they made here.



The first writer in City of Asylum was Huang Xiang. He was and still is one of the most charismatic figures I have ever encountered. He inspired many of the programs at City of Asylum—from the “house publications” on Sampsonia Way to Jazz Poetry—as well as inspiring many others here in Pittsburgh. Last Spring Huang Xiang returned to City of Asylum @ Alphabet City for a reading and met Osama and Tuhin for the first time. In addition to being recognized for his poetry, Huang Xiang’s paintings are gaining attention. The Maridon Museum in Butler presented a retrospective exhibition of his artwork in the Spring of 2017.



In addition to long term sanctuary for exiled writers, City of Asylum provides shorter residencies to writers. In 2017, we hosted 5 international authors for 1-3 months— and each of them also did one or more free public programs at Alphabet City: Vilma Vargas of Ecuador, Enza Garcia of Venezuela, Ramsha Ashraf of Pakistan, and Sabien Clement and Mieke Versyp from Belgium.

We also hosted two U.S. authors for residencies—Suzanne Rivecca and Porochista Khakpour and expanded our children’s storytelling, with storytellers from Columbia, Brazil, and different U.S. heritages. And Thumbscrew returned for a jazz residency during which they created and recorded music for three cds—one original and two of standards—that will be coming out next year.



The artists in residence and those whom we present are diverse global voices: to date we have presented artists from 73 countries—voices otherwise not accessible in Pittsburgh....along with a vast array of under-represented voices from across the U.S.

We named our new building Alphabet City, because through words--used creatively and without fear—we share our best thoughts....and compose our future together. Censorship and threats against writers harm not only the affected writers but also each of us, individually and as a society.



For this reason, for many of us, a highlight of the year was Zineb El Rhazoui’s impassioned defense of creative freedom in her Freedom-to-Write conversation with Silvia Duarte. Passing through metal detectors into Alphabet City, which was first screened by a police canine crew, to hear from a speaker under 24-hour guard—even here in Pittsburghwas an evening we will never forget. And a vivid and chilling reminder of why what we are doing together in Pittsburgh is so important.

Making sure that endangered and under-represented voices like Zineb’s are given a safe place to create and to be heard....and that everyone has the opportunity to hear them, without barriers of access....is the common thread among our City of Asylum programs.

And despite what sometimes seems like a dark time for the arts and the human spirit, Mayor Peduto’s final words to us and you, our friends and supporters, are a reminder that we are making a difference, that we just need to continue on our path together: *“All the fantastic things you have done here are a big inspiration--to the future and the work of freedom of expression, solidarity, and hospitality throughout the U.S. and throughout the world.”* What better thought to start 2018!

Sincerely and with gratitude,

Henry

Henry Reese, co-founder

P.S. Please consider donating and/or pledging to City of Asylum. Details are on the next page.

HERE IS HOW YOU CAN HELP NOW!



✓ YES, I will help City of Asylum meet the 2 Challenges

A donation of any amount would be greatly appreciated. By donating, you can also help City of Asylum meet 2 challenges before January 10. You can help us meet the challenges by:

- 1 Making a year-end donation.**
(We are only \$25,000 away from an additional \$100,000 match by The Opportunity Fund.)
- 2 Pledging to continue donating at your 2017 level, for 2 or 3 years.**
(Pledges will also be matched dollar for dollar, up to an additional \$100,000 per year!)

Make a donation online at:
cityofasylumpittsburgh.secure.force.com/donate/?dfid=a0n5A00000BCb5PQAT

Or mail your check along with this form to:
City of Asylum / 40 W. North Ave. / Pittsburgh, PA 15212

Your name and address: _____

Your email: _____

1 Yes, I will increase my donation by \$ I understand it will be matched.
Please make out your check to "City of Asylum."
Or Card #: _____ Expires: ____ / ____
 Visa Master Amex CVV: _____

2 Yes, I pledge to continue donating to City of Asylum. No money necessary now.
⇒ I pledge to continue my 2017 donation for: 2 years 3 years
Pledge 2 years and the Opportunity Fund will match the increase in #1 for each year.
Pledge 3 years and the Anonymous Foundation will also double your ENTIRE pledge.
It will match all 3 years 100%, dollar for dollar

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT!
YOUR PLEDGE MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE TO US.
(An envelope is enclosed.)