

Chicana Poet, Educator, and Activist Arrives at Gettysburg for first-ever Poetry Foundation Residency

GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA, UNITED STATES, September 7, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Gettysburg National Military Park's first POETS IN THE PARKS Artist-in-Residence will be Los Angeles Poet Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo. Ms. Bermejo is a published poet, having published her work at American Poetry Review, crazyhorse, Calyx, and Acentos Review, among others. Like many of the [National Parks Arts Foundation](#) (NPAF) residents, she has a unique and interesting background featuring a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts from California State University at Long Beach, and a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Antioch University Los Angeles. Her latest collection is POSADA: OFFERINGS OF WITNESS AND REFUGE (Sundress Publications 2016). Ms. Bermejo finds that her background in performance arts is essential to her writing: "Even though I don't act now, I think it helps me write character and voice, and it definitely helps when I read in front of an audience."



NPAF is proud to be ongoing partners with the National Park Service at Gettysburg National Military Park and the Gettysburg Foundation as well as THE [POETRY FOUNDATION](#) to provide the pilot residency Poets in the Parks within the Gettysburg National Military Park Artist-in-Residence program. Ms. Bermejo will begin her month-long residency in mid-September.

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Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo

Ms. Bermejo will showcase her work and reflect on her Gettysburg residency during Gettysburg's First Friday at the David Wills House, on Lincoln Square in downtown Gettysburg, on October 6, from 5 to 8 p.m. During this free, artist showcase, the exhibits at David Wills House will be open free to the public.

After her residency she will go on a sponsored tour of public readings to showcase her new work at the residency, as well as public workshops on writing Witness Poetry, which adapts social justice

themes to expand the variety of voices in the American consciousness — vital perspectives that would otherwise be invalidated or dismissed. Ms. Bermejo will head out for public readings at the Poetry Foundation Headquarters in Chicago as well as in Washington, DC.

With a national debate currently raging about the sensitive issues regarding the representation and memorial of Civil War trauma and history, the National Park Service's role in recognizing and fostering a democratic and participatory dialogue through the arts has never been more important. The tensions between commemoration, memory and history are issues that Gettysburg National Military Park's rangers address year-round. They are no strangers to these questions.

Neither is Ms. Bermejo, who combines an ability to channel both the spirit of a place, and its voices, as well as articulate questions of memory, trauma and history in the most intimate way. She works as close to the bone as possible, often by going to what she, with a matter of fact lucidity, calls war-zones. Says Bermejo: "I believe I'm a location poet. I believe I gain inspiration from being in a location and walking in the setting of a place."

Gathering up the aura of current and past battlefields is very much tied, for her, to an activist-archival tradition, that comes from her own family history of diasporic movements in and around Los Angeles and the growing appreciation in her work of her hometown of San Gabriel, CA, (a suburb of Los Angeles) as well as the always living post-colonial history of California and the West. She was moved to go directly to a wounded area contested in brutal colonization/re-colonization for almost four hundred years: the Arizona Borderlands. Says Xochitl: "For my first book, I wanted to write about immigration, so I volunteered with the direct humanitarian aid organization, No More Deaths/No Mas Muertes. I spent nearly two weeks camping and hiking in the low-grade war-zone along the Tucson-Sector of the Arizona-Mexico border. That experience fueled my poetry."

This is the first Artist-in-Residence that is expressly designed and curated in coordination with THE POETRY FOUNDATION of Chicago to raise the profile of Poetry as a vibrant and modern way to do public art. The poems of Ms. Bermejo's next series, (which she plans to publish in chapbook form after her residency) are very much a response to America in 2017. As she says: "In my new collection, I want to capture the deep sense of melancholia that has taken over our collective American psyche since the last presidential election, and the fight many of our feeling to regain a passion for what we know is right and good. I believe the Gettysburg National Military Park is the perfect location for this project, and I'm excited to see how it's history steeped in political unrest, the malaise of war, and the continued fight for good will inspire my social justice poetry."

The program is offered thanks to the input and support of the National Park Service and the Gettysburg Foundation and the partnership with the Poetry Foundation, whose joint efforts make the park the foremost visitor destination for those interested in the epic history of the American Civil War. "Gettysburg National Military Park has offered inspiration to artists for more than 150 years," said Bill Justice, acting superintendent at Gettysburg National Military Park. "The Artist-in-Residence program continues the tradition begun by artists like Alexander Gardner, Alfred Waud, and Gutzon Borglum, while simultaneously engaging our visitors and telling this story in new and compelling ways."

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of Poetry magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs. For more information, please visit poetryfoundation.org.

The Poetry Foundation is very excited and proud to help bring poetry to the place that was the

inspiration for President Lincoln's immortal "Gettysburg Address", which is poetry itself," said Henry Bienen, president of the Poetry Foundation. "Together with the National Parks Arts Foundation and National Park Service at Gettysburg National Military Park and the Gettysburg Foundation, we congratulate Ms. Bermejo on being the first Poets in the Parks artist in residence."

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