

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Spencertown Academy Virtual Festival of Books
October 7 through October 31**

Zoom events with distinguished authors, children's programs, and online book sale

Spencertown, New York—Spencertown Academy Arts Center's sixteenth annual Festival of Books will take place online this year, with virtual events running from Thursday, October 7 through Sunday, October 31. The Festival will feature Zoom programs with distinguished authors, children's events, and a "Special Book Room" online sale. Featured authors include Ayad Akhtar, Nancy Castaldo, Michael Kupperman, Clare Mulley, Sonia Purnell, Rishi Reddi, Rick Rogers, Russell Shorto, and Peter Sis. Admission is free to all events, but advance registration is required. For program details, please see www.spencertownacademy.org.

The Festival, which began in 2006 as a book sale to raise funds for the Academy's community arts programs, has grown into one of the biggest and most eagerly anticipated cultural events of the year. Academy Board members David Highfill and Jill Kalotay co-chair the Festival.

"This year, in spite of the hopes we had for almost everyone to be protected with vaccines by this fall, we will again hold a virtual Festival of Books," says Highfill, vice president and executive editor at William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers. "The challenging logistics of our space, and our foremost wish to protect the health of our community and our treasured volunteers, have led us to the decision to err on the side of caution."

"We are really happy about the variety and quality of the works we are presenting, with several prize-winning authors represented," says Kalotay. "Also, we have some 'firsts' that should be fun: a live cooking demonstration by Rick Rodgers, a graphic memoir by Michael Kupperman, and an interview with world-famous children's book author-illustrator Peter Sis, followed by a

program for children featuring one of his books.”

ONLINE BOOK SALE

The “Special Book Room” online sale will open to Academy members on Friday, October 8 at 10:00am and to the general public on Saturday, October 9 at 10:00am; it will run through Sunday, October 31 at midnight. More than 400 carefully selected volumes in like-new condition, as well as CDs, DVDs, vinyl LPs, and ephemera will fill the virtual shelves. The collection includes art, architecture, design, biography/memoir, children’s/young adult, cookbooks, fiction, history, music/film, photography, signed books, and other offerings. Quirky or collectible, rare or simply stunning, all are priced accordingly from \$5 to \$1,000 and everything in between. Note: Purchases must be picked up by appointment at Spencertown Academy; there will be no shipping.

Volunteer Wayne Greene has expertly examined covers and spines, scanned pages for signatures or marginalia, and assessed each book’s value in antiquarian or contemporary circles. Among the most valuable treasures to be offered are a first edition, second printing of Mark Twain’s 1875 *Sketches New and Old*, which is filled with engraved black-and-white illustrations (\$1,000); John Singer Sargent’s *Portraits, Figures and Landscapes*, a rare set of seven beautifully illustrated coffee table books (\$750); a 1904 first edition *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* by Edith Wharton with illustrations by Maxfield Parrish (\$250); a limited and numbered edition of Françoise Gilot’s *Three Travel Sketchbooks*, depicting Venice, India, and Senegal (\$200); and *The Great War* by Winston Churchill, three volumes in red cloth with embossed gilt lettering on spine (\$150).

ZOOM EVENTS

Thursday, October 7

The Festival kicks off at 7:00pm with authors Rishi Reddi and Dexter Palmer discussing their works of historical fiction. Reddi’s debut novel, *Passage West*, tells the story of a Punjabi family, their Mexican in-laws, and their Japanese neighbors at the onset of World War I in

California. It was an *L.A. Times* “Best California Book of 2020” and a finalist for the New England Independent Booksellers Association’s New England Book Award in fiction. Palmer’s *Mary Toft; or, The Rabbit Queen* fictionalizes the unlikely but true event of a woman giving birth to 17 rabbits in 18th century England, confounding apprentice and experienced surgeons in rural England and London, and intriguing King George I. It was long-listed for the Dublin Literary Award and shortlisted for the Joyce Carol Oates Prize. The authors will be joined in conversation with Daphne Kalotay, whose latest novel is *Blue Hours*.

Saturday, October 9

At 3:00pm, culinary professional and author Rick Rogers will conduct a cooking demonstration while being interviewed by Madaline Sparks, Festival Committee member. On the menu will be *Almas Pite*, or Hungarian apple pie, a classic pastry featured in his book, *Kaffeehaus: Exquisite Desserts from Classic Cafés*. Their conversation will range from baking tips to celebrities and famous chefs he’s worked with, to challenges unique to publishing cookbooks. As an author, editor, or ghostwriter, Rogers has published over 75 books, several of which landed on the *New York Times* bestseller list or went on to win James Beard and IACP Cookbook Awards.

Sunday, October 10

At 4:00pm, internationally acclaimed children’s book author and illustrator Peter Sis will discuss his latest work, *Nicky and Vera: A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust and the Children He Rescued*, with Carl Atkins, Festival Committee member. This true story of the Holocaust was written for children, but carries a message of decency, action, and courage for all ages. Born in the Czech Republic, Sis has won the *New York Times Book Review* Best Illustrated Book of the Year award seven times, the American Library Association’s Caldecott Honor three times, the Hans Christian Andersen medal for illustration, and a MacArthur Fellowship.

Tuesday, October 12

At 7:00pm, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and playwright Ayad Akhtar will discuss his nationally bestselling book, *Homeland Elegies*, with Julie DeLisle, former director of the Chatham Public

Library. Blending fact and fiction, *Homeland Elegies* is the story of a Pakistani immigrant and his American-born son in post-Trump America. The *New York Times* selected it as a Top 10 Book of 2020 and Barack Obama named it one of his favorite books of the year. Akhtar is currently adapting the work into a limited series at FX, with director Oren Moverman and starring Kumail Nanjiani.

Thursday October 14

At 7:00pm, historian and author Russell Shorto will discuss his latest book, *Smalltime: A Story of My Family and the Mob*, in which he reveals how his grandfather and great-uncle ran the mob in his hometown in Pennsylvania. He is a contributing writer to *New York Times Magazine* and the author of six books, including the national bestseller *The Island at the Center of the World*. David Cudaback, Festival Committee member, will join the author in conversation.

Saturday, October 16

Children's Program

At 10:00am, author Nancy Castaldo will give a presentation about her book, *Sniffer Dogs: How Dogs (and Their Noses) Save the World*. Castaldo turns her own fascination with the natural world into science-themed books that inform and engage children. She has written award-winning books about the earth for over 20 years, including *The Story of Seeds*, which earned the Green Earth Book Award, Junior Library Guild Selection, and other honors. In *Sniffer Dogs*, children learn about dogs' exquisitely sensitive noses, and how their handlers train the animals to detect bombs or drugs, save people from rubble, or detect diabetics' blood sugar levels. This program is suitable for children age 10 and up.

Sunday, October 17

Children's Program

At 10:00am, Ann Gainer, storyteller and librarian at New Lebanon and Altamont Libraries, will read aloud and discuss with children, Peter Sis's *Nicky and Vera: A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust and the Children He Rescued*. Nicky was a young Englishman who went to Prague to help

refugees from the Nazis; Vera, one of the children he saved. His efforts to raise money, find foster homes in England, and ultimately transport over 600 children are told with luminous, poetic images. This program is suitable for children age eight and up.

Sunday, October 17

At 4:00pm, Sonia Purnell and Clare Mulley, two historians and authors whose books focus on remarkable women and their roles in WWII, will discuss their works with David Highfill, Festival co-chair. Purnell's *A Woman of No Importance* tells the story of an American heiress, injured in an accident, who broke disability and gender barriers to spy for the British and lead a core unit of French resistance. It was a *New York Times* bestseller and won the Plutarch Prize for Biography. Mulley's biography, *The Spy Who Loved*, relates the ventures of a Polish-born part Jewish countess called Churchill's favorite spy who served behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied France. Publication of this book led to Mulley being decorated with Poland's national cultural honor, the Bene Merito.

Tuesday, October 19

At 7:00pm, Eisner Award-winning writer and artist Michael Kupperman will speak with journalist Virgil Texas about his graphic memoir, *All the Answers*. In it, he tells the story of his famous father, a child prodigy on the TV show "Quiz Kids." With wit and heart, he presents a fascinating account of mid-century radio and early television history, the pro-Jewish propaganda entertainment used to counteract anti-Semitism, and the early age of modern celebrity culture. NPR, *Vulture*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal*, and the New York Public Library all named it a best book of 2018. Kupperman's work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Fortune*, and the *New York Times*. He has published comic books for DC, Marvel, and others, five of his own books, and animated for *Saturday Night Live*, Adult Swim, and Comedy Central.

Founded in 1972, Spencertown Academy Arts Center is a cultural center and community resource serving Columbia County, the Berkshires, and the Capital region. Housed in a landmark 1847 Greek Revival schoolhouse, the Academy is located at 790 State Route 203 in Spencertown, New York. For more information, please contact info@spencertownacademy.org.