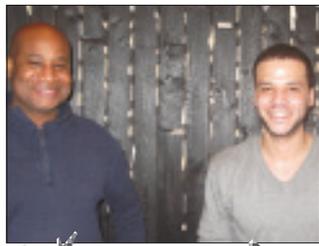




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An accomplished author of black poetry and other books, Reed College Professor Samiya Bashir, is changing the narrative on what it means to be part of the black experience in Portland.

Shining a light on Portland community of black artists

BY OLIVIA OLIVIA
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Samiya Bashir is in the midst of writing her latest book and preparing for her next reading series. As a creative writing professor at Reed College in southeast Portland, her passion, she says, is “people and communities: how we treat each other and how we treat ourselves; how we interact, and how we make the world together.”

The daughter of Somali father and an African American mother, Bashir grew up in Ann Arbor, Mich. She started teaching poetry at Reed in 2012.

Now a literary icon in Portland, she is a great example for disrupting the narratives about what students at Reed and people in Portland look like.

“People like to say that there are no black people in Portland, or that there are no black artists in Portland; but we are here,” Bashir says.

Changing the Narrative

Bashir made waves during Portland’s recent Poetry Press Week with her writings and the performances accompanying it.

“When I did Poetry Press Week at Disjecta, I deliberately included two young black women—April Kaplowitz and India Hamilton—who are Reed students, along with another local black artist, Keyon Gaskin, and local letterpress artist Tracy Schlapp, in order to interrupt these narratives about who and what Reed students are, who and what Portland artists are—what we look like, sound like, this idea that we

are not here and doing necessary work.”

Bashir herself has had family in Portland for a long time, and she even recalls one of her early memories as a writer being that of a family member who inspired her right here in Portland.

“My cousin, William Hilliard, was the first black editor of a major newspaper in the country. That newspaper was *The Oregonian*. When I was a little girl who knew I wanted to be a writer, that cousin of mine—way out in Portland, Oregon—was one of the few people who encouraged me and my writing.”

Bashir just finished a book of poems called *Laws of the Blackbody*, individual poems from of which are available in print magazines online literary journals.

Her most recent book, *Gospel* (2009), was a finalist for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award and the 2009 Lambda Literary Award. Her earlier book, *Where the Apple Falls* (2005), was a Poetry Foundation bestseller and finalist for the 2005 Lambda Literary Award.

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