New Haven—Yale University Press is pleased to announce a winner in the 2023 Yale Series of Younger Poets competition. The judge, prize-winning and critically acclaimed poet Rae Armantrout, has chosen Cindy Juyoung Ok’s manuscript, Ward Toward. This is Armantrout’s third selection since being named judge of America’s longest-running poetry prize, succeeding Carl Phillips.

Armantrout says: “Cindy Juyoung Ok is a wonderfully inventive poet with a command of her craft. She writes in many forms, some invented, but her constant impulse is to break the frame, to escape oppressive containments. She pushes constantly against the social norms that have sometimes trapped her, writing with startling frankness about mental wards, domestic abuse, and racial stereotyping. Her impulse is to shake things up. Using dream material, sound play, puns, and grammatic instability, she shows that there is always more than one way to make sense, as she elegantly argues at the end of ‘The Five Room Dance’: ‘a closed round, the words we cross a swarm / from which I am wrung. As I, wrong, form.’”

Of her recent win, Cindy Juyoung Ok says: “I am elated by this news and grateful to the people who made this possible, both at the series and in my writing. A preoccupation of my book is what connects and alienates the rooms that make up a life, and since teenagehood,
many volumes of the Yale Series of Younger Poets have made those spaces novel, known, and whole to me. I feel delighted to be included in the series and am always thankful to the family, friends, students, teachers, and communities that have heartened me and my poetry. They made it possible for me to question and develop the styles and grammars that led to this manuscript, which, apart from me, only the judge and others at the prize have read. I am astonished that next year, the pages will have the chance to be opened by many. Thank you.”

Yale University Press will publish Ok’s book in April 2024. The manuscript is the 118th volume in the series. Its last volume, Mary-Alice Daniel’s Mass for Shut-Ins, will be published by Yale University Press on March 21, 2022.

Cindy Juyoung Ok teaches undergraduate creative writing, as well as edits, translates, and reviews poetry. A recent MacDowell Fellow, she has published poems from the manuscript in The Nation, Poetry, and The Yale Review.

Awarded since 1919 by Yale University Press, the Yale Series of Younger Poets celebrates the most prominent new American poets by bringing the work of these artists to the attention of the larger public. Earlier winners of the prize include such giants as Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery, and Robert Hass. It is the longest-running poetry prize in the United States.

Yale University Press will also continue its partnership with The James Merrill House. Winners of the Series will receive one of the five writing fellowships offered at The James Merrill House in Stonington, CT. The fellowship provides a furnished living space and daily access to James Merrill’s apartment for a writer in search of a quiet setting to complete a project of literary or academic merit.

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