From the Vice President

Ida Yoshinaga

As we head into the holidays, planning our first Estonia-set international meeting for May 2024, let’s take stock. From two successful European conferences—Oslo, 2022, and Dresden, 2023, both well-attended—and now helping to organize Tartu, 2024, we on the Executive Committee are evolving the 21st-century conference format to reflect “post”-COVID era changes in the world and in academia.

How can our in-person/hybrid meetings improve towards becoming more international as well as inclusive? For 2022 in Norway, we began offering a DEI workshop in addition to the other EC-sponsored activities (such as our annual Early-Career Researchers’ professional-development session, focused on tenure-track position searches or on scholarly publishing). During that Q&A session, Ph.D. students, postdocs, and adjuncts told us they had simply desired a gathering of various non-tenure track researchers who were on the job market, to talk amongst themselves. As a result, we scheduled such a session in the 2023 German conference this past August.

We also heard 2022 Oslo attendees respond that there was much theorizing about colonialism and Indigeneity at that meeting but much fewer actual Indigenous voices. So for the 2023 Dresden meeting, our DEI session featured a Native Aymara scholar from Bolivia, Ruben Dario Chambi, who’s doing doctoral work at LMU Munich. Chambi shared his research on Aymara in his home city, including both Aymara speculative-architectural expression, and settler literary utopias of Bolivia. Graciously, Leo Cornum’s superlative keynote on moon landings referenced this Ph.D. student’s presentation, so it was a (relatively) rare exchange, at an SFRA conference, between ideas of Native intellectuals from different parts of the globe—something we hope for more and more in the future.

For 2024 Estonia, we hope that among other goals/topics, to bring to the spotlight queer/trans speculative arts (the topic of our ECR DEI workshop). We are thrilled to feature among our three keynotes noted poet-writer-translator Bogi Takács, a hybrid scholar-artist whose multiple talents and knowledge sets we expect will enrich conference conversations.

The question of how to best support our LGBTQIA2S+ community members in this dystopian time of draconian governmental laws that threaten these members’ safety and very lives, has arisen many times in EC discussions about where to hold both upcoming conferences (Estonia being one of the first former Soviet countries to pass relatively progressive LGBTQIA2S+ legislation) and future meetings (we’ve had many talks about whether SFRA should be held at all in US states with strongly anti-Critical-Race-Theory and misogynist, in addition to anti-trans, laws).

We hope you can present in Estonia, too, and while attending—if you choose to participate in person—also enjoy the Tartu Literary Festival Prima Vista (https://tartu2024.ee/kirjandusfestival)
FROM THE SFRA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

From the VP

held at about the same time, themed “Better or Worse Futures.” Many thanks to Jaak Tomberg and his team for putting together our Tartu meeting and coordinating it with the festival for an optimal sf-arts and sf-scholarship experience! They’re working in the spirit of utopia: may we all look forward to better futures indeed.

Don't forget to submit your own conference abstract or proposal by November 24 (https://sfra.org/sfra-2023-conference)! And provide feedback to the hybrid Dresden meeting in our soon-to-be-emailed survey or directly to me (ida@hawaii.edu) or to Hugh (hugh.oconnell@umb.edu).