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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NIKKY FINNEY WINS 2011 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FOR POETRY

Cave Canem Faculty Members Finney, Komunyakaa & Phillips Dominate Poetry Category

Brooklyn, NY (November 22, 2011)—**Cave Canem Foundation**, North America’s premier home for black poetry, congratulates faculty member **Nikky Finney** on receiving the **2011 National Book Award** for her fourth collection of poetry, *Head Off & Split* (Triquarterly/Northwestern University Press, 2011), cited by judges Elizabeth Alexander (Chair), Thomas Sayers Ellis, Amy Gerstler, Kathleen Graber and Roberto Tejada as “nam[ing] the eviscerations of place and time with empathy and boldness of point of view.” An alumna Cave Canem faculty member, Ms. Finney will return to the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, PA in June 2012 to teach at Cave Canem’s 17th annual writing retreat for emerging adult African American poets.

Three of this year’s five National Book Award finalists for Poetry are Cave Canem faculty members. Adrienne Rich’s *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve: Poems 2007-2010* and Bruce Smith’s *Devotions* were nominated alongside **Finney’s *Head Off & Split***, **Yusef Komunyakaa’s *The Chameleon Couch*** and **Carl Phillips’ *Double Shadow***. The judges lauded four-time National Book Award finalist Phillips’ newest collection as “ringingly beautiful and exquisitely distilled ...with courage, dignity, and forgiveness,” and described Pulitzer Prize winner Komunyakaa’s latest volume as “writing that makes its own world.” Of *Head Off & Split*, they wrote, “Finney finds poetic joy and political imagination in family wisdom, workaday living, and erotic syllables that sing the body of women.”

Head Off & Split has garnered praise from Nikki Giovanni, Kwame Dawes and Bruce Weigl, among others. Ms. Finney is the author of three previous volumes of poetry: *The World Is Round*, winner of the 2004 Benjamin Franklin Award for Poetry; *Rice*, winner of the PEN American Open Book Award in 1995, and *On Wings Made of Gauze* (1985). A recipient of the Kentucky Foundation for Women Artists Fellowship Award, she is also the author of *Heartwood*, a collection of stories, and editor

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of Cave Canem's second anthology, *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South* (U. of Georgia Press, 2007). She is Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Kentucky.

The mission of the **National Book Foundation** and the **National Book Awards** is to celebrate the best of American literature, to expand its audience and to enhance the cultural value of good writing in America. The first award ceremony was held in 1950, bringing together the American literary community for the first time to honor the year's best work in fiction, nonfiction and poetry. Over a half-century later, the National Book Awards continues to recognize the best of American literature, raising the cultural appreciation of great writing in the country while advancing the careers of both established and emerging writers. For more information, visit nationalbook.org.

Founded in 1996 by poets Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady to remedy the under-representation and isolation of African American poets in MFA programs and writing workshops, **Cave Canem** is a home for the many voices of African American poetry and is committed to cultivating the artistic and professional growth of African American poets. The organization has grown from an initial gathering of 26 poets to become an influential movement with a renowned faculty and a high-achieving national fellowship of 319. Its programs include an annual week-long retreat, first- and second-book prizes with prestigious presses, Legacy Conversations with pre-eminent black poets and scholars, Poets on Craft talks, community-based writing workshops, publications and national readings. Such pre-eminent poets as Elizabeth Alexander and Natasha Trethewey number among the organization's faculty and judges. To date, Cave Canem has published *Gathering Ground: A Reader Celebrating Cave Canem's First Decade* (University of Michigan Press, 2006) and *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South* (The University of Georgia Press, 2007). *Cave Canem Anthology 2008-2009* is forthcoming from Willow Books in early 2012. For more information, visit cavecanempoets.org.

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