



Contact: Annie Guthrie  
[guthrie@email.arizona.edu](mailto:guthrie@email.arizona.edu)

520-626-4310

[poetry.arizona.edu](http://poetry.arizona.edu)

**New UA Poetry Center Exhibit Celebrating LGBTQ Pride Month:  
*Lesbian and Feminist Works from the Marie J. Kuda Archives***

*April 21, 2014, Tucson Arizona*— The UA Poetry Center presents **an exhibition of lesbian and feminist works** from the personal archives of Chicago-area writer, historian, activist and publisher Marie J. Kuda **in celebration of LGBTQ Pride Month**. “Lesbian and Feminist Works from the Marie J. Kuda Archives” **opens May 19** and will run until July 30, 2014. The exhibit will include a wide range of materials; from books to small pamphlets to postcards to typescripts, **the materials on display tell the story of feminist and particularly lesbian poets creating a language for their experiences**. Some of the materials on display had very limited distribution, and they present a unique snapshot of this important political and social movement. The titles of the books really emphasize this: *Ready to Be Touched By Rough Hands*; *Burn This and Memorize Yourself*; *Sweet Sixteen*; *The Enclosed Garden*. Lesbian writers were creating their own language to directly express the romantic experiences of women-identified women. That was a radical thing in the 1970’s and it remains so today.

**About the Exhibit:**

**The exhibit includes rare items related to legendary Black feminist writer Gwendolyn Brooks**, whose honors including being the first Black woman to be the U.S. Poet Laureate (at that time called poetry consultant to the Library of Congress), the first Black writer to win the Pulitzer Prize, and Poet Laureate of the State of Illinois. Included is a program from the 1996 dedication of Jane Addams Memorial Park in Chicago, signed by Brooks as well as opera singer Jessye Norman and feminist icon **Gloria Steinem**, and including Brooks’ handwritten notes on her poem published in the program; and a rare first issue, **first printing of Brooks’ *Riot* (Broadside Press, 1969) written in the aftermath of the disturbances in Chicago that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

One of the books on display, Vernita Gray’s self-published chapbook *Sweet Sixteen* (1985), is the **only published book from an LGBTQ activist and writer whose incredible legacy continues to the present day**. In the 1970’s, Vernita Gray established the first lesbian newspaper in Chicago. Her activism continued throughout her life (see obituaries <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/PASSAGES-Vernita-Gray-longtime-activist-dies/46665.html> and <http://www.glbtrt.ala.org/news/archives/713>). On November 27, 2013, while terminally ill with cancer, **Vernita Gray made history when she and her wife Pat Ewart became the first same-sex couple to be legally married in the state of Illinois**. A judge allowed them to wed before the state marriage equality law took effect (which will happen on June 1, 2014). She died several months later, on March 19, 2014.

### **About Marie J. Kuda and LGBTQ history:**

Marie J. Kuda was a Chicago-area writer, historian, activist and publisher. She founded *Womanpress* in Chicago in the 1970's, a press publishing lesbian feminist voices. She also created and organized the Lesbian Writers Conferences held in Chicago from 1974 to 1978. She has been a literary mentor to lesbian and feminist writers and an active voice in the Chicago writing scene. She compiled a lifelong personal collection of books, chapbooks, pamphlets, ephemera, and historical materials relating to lesbian and feminist writers and activism, as well as Chicago's literary history. **She also has ties to Tucson, with several close friends in town. Sandra Szelag, Poetry Center docent and close friend of Marie J. Kuda, helped to arrange the donation of the exhibited works.**

**Underwriters/Sponsors:** The items on display in this exhibit are part of the University of Arizona Poetry Center's permanent collection, and were generously donated by Shirley Rissman for the Marie J. Kuda Archives.

*The University of Arizona Poetry Center is housed in one of three landmark buildings for poetry in the nation. In addition to its world-renowned collection of contemporary poetry, the Poetry Center is known for its long running readings and lecture series, international symposia, classes and workshops, writers' residencies, and a wide range of programs for children and youth. For more information, please visit [poetry.arizona.edu](http://poetry.arizona.edu) or call (520) 626-3765.*