



2024
Hotchkiss
All-School Read

BY CELESTE NG

OUR MISSING HEARTS



Alisha Soto, *Lecciones de Amor*

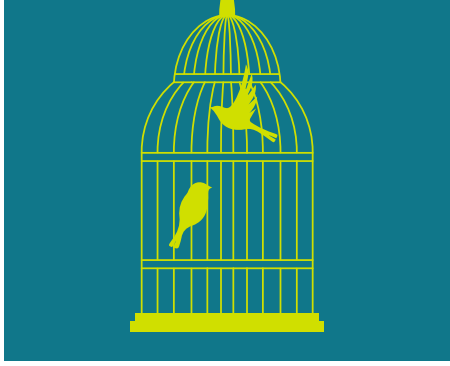


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

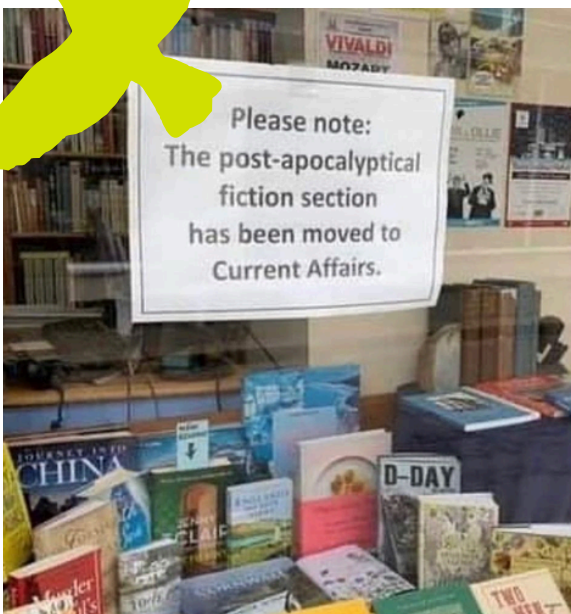
Celeste Ng is the author of three novels: *Everything I Never Told You* (2014), *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017), and *Our Missing Hearts* (2022). She grew up in Pittsburgh, PA and Shaker Heights, OH before earning a B.A. from Harvard and an MFA from the University of Michigan. Watch a [short video](#) about how the All-School Read Committee chose this book!

Ng (pronounced *ing*) has published her work in newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, and won a Pushcart Prize.





FREEDOM TO READ



In *Our Missing Hearts*, the fictional passage of the Preserving American Culture and Traditions Act, or PACT, results in the widespread censorship of books considered “insufficiently American.” Bird discovers that his mother’s book of poetry has been removed from public libraries and destroyed. In the real world, governments have historically utilized book bans to control a population’s exposure to ideas that challenge the status quo.

- According to the [American Library Association](#), book bans reached an all-time high in the United States in 2023, with “4,240 unique book titles targeted for removal from schools and libraries.”
- Did you know that 85 percent of librarians are female? In Ng’s novel, these women become the keepers of secret knowledge and participants in mass organized protest. Listen to this [short clip from NPR](#) about one librarian in Colorado who fought back when she was fired.
- Acclaimed novelist Lauren Groff, author of *Matrix* (which all Hotchkiss upper mids will read this summer) has opened a new bookstore in Gainesville, FL in response to the proliferation of book bans. Read about the [opening of The Lynx](#) or visit the [bookstore’s website](#).

“Bird and Margaret’s world isn’t exactly our world, but it isn’t *not* ours, either... I drew inspiration from many real-life events, both past and current – and in some cases, things I’d imagined had become realities by the time the novel was done... there are far too many instances of free expression being stifled – and discrimination rationalized – under the guise of ‘protection’ and ‘security.’” – Celeste Ng, Author’s Note (327-331)

A note on genre: *Our Missing Hearts* is an example of **speculative**, rather than dystopian, fiction. In speculative novels, the author is certainly inventing negative events or practices that have not yet happened (like PACT), but the world portrayed is so close to our own that we can imagine it clearly (e.g., anti-Asian hate, forced separation of families), without the detailed explanations or world-building typical of true dystopian fiction.

THE ART OF PROTEST

In *Our Missing Hearts*, artists use lines from Margaret Miu's poetry to create stunning visual art in opposition to PACT. They are protesting book censorship, anti-Asian discrimination, and the separation of children from their parents.

The protest art depicted in Ng's novel is rooted in the work of real artists. [Check out this list](#) of some of the most influential works of American protest art.

Yarnbombing is the practice of installing textile "graffiti art" in public spaces, often containing a political call to action. As textile art, yarnbombing is closely associated with women's labor and a feminist reclamation of urban space and public discourse.

On this page (clockwise from top left):

Carmen Community Artist, *Get Out and Vote*
Felicia Provenzano, *Heart of the City*
Linette Messina, *Say Her Name*

Left: A guerilla art installation on the streets of New York City in 2019, protesting the living conditions of immigrant children in U.S. border camps, including their forced separation from parents.

Right: In this composite image by Lex Villena and Helen Haigh, the TikTok logo is juxtaposed with the Statue of Liberty. Created for an article about the possible ban on TikTok usage in the United States, the illustration asks whether such a ban would inhibit American freedoms.



In the book:
37-40
244-46

NO KIDS IN CAGES



POETRY

Our Missing Hearts highlights poetry as an integral raw material for social change.



Though Margaret Miu does not intend for her book to start a revolution, her words resonate with a single activist, initiating an entire movement based upon her words. In the book, Marie Johnson, the 19 year-old who popularizes the protest slogan from Margaret's poem and is eventually killed by police during a PACT protest, discovers Margaret's book of poems thanks to a librarian: "Marie had started with the poems from school, Keats and Wordsworth and Yeats, and had come looking for more, and the librarian had helped her find it: Lucille Clifton, Adrienne Rich, Ada Limón, Ross Gay" (224). Fun fact: this list includes two consecutive visiting poets to Hotchkiss (see photos at right)!

Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, whose words appear in the epigraph to Ng's novel, saw her books banned and her voice suppressed for decades due to Soviet censorship. She continued to write, though her full oeuvre was only made available to the public after her death. You can visit [Poetry Foundation](#) to learn more about her life and read a selection of her poems.

Can you think of a piece of art that changed your beliefs? Why do you think art has the ability to change our minds, even when logic and reason cannot?



Ada Limón

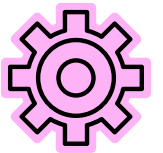
U.S. Poet Laureate
2025 Lambert Lecturer



Ross Gay

2024 Lambert Lecturer

TECHNOLOGY



Though poetry gives the movement in *Our Missing Hearts* its rhetorical power and visual art sustains the interest of the public, the climactic moment depends on Margaret's use of technology – namely, a plethora of microspeakers and a laptop.

Consider the scenes on pages 261-66 and 391-302. How do you think art and science work together to create social change? Can you think of other times in history when a movement was fueled by the fusion of art and technology? Is technology an unmitigated good in the political life of a nation, or do you think it comes with too many risks and needs to be regulated?

Save the Date

Ada Limón, the current U.S. Poet Laureate, will visit Hotchkiss as the Lambert Lecturer in Poetry in May 2025!