



The Loft Literary Center

Open Book Suite 200
1011 Washington Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55415

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CONTACT:

Chris Jones
cjones@loft.org

The Loft Literary Center Announces 2022–2023 Mentor Series Fellows

Twelve Minnesota Early Career Writers Selected for the Year-long Fellowship Program

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of the Loft Mentor Series Fellowship. The Mentor Series Fellowship offers 12 early career Minnesota writers the opportunity to work intensively with six nationally acclaimed writers of prose and poetry.

Selected participants work throughout the year with the six mentors, and all participants and mentors give public readings at the Loft. Dates for those readings will be announced in December. Learn more [about the program here](#).

This program is funded by the Jerome Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the generous support of Loft members.

2022–2023 ENTRIES AND SELECTIONS

The Loft Literary Center received 68 entries to the 2022–2023 Loft Mentor Series Fellowship in Poetry and Creative Prose, from which the current program mentors



had the difficult task of choosing the four fellows and two honorable mentions each in the genres of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. The fellows are listed below.

Nonfiction Selections

Kathryn Ganfield, Caitlin Jiao (Hinschberger) Alexander, Josina Manu Maltzman, and **Benjamin Ren** have been selected for the yearlong fellowship program in creative nonfiction.

Honorable mentions are Dorothy Bouzouma and ER Harris.

Poetry Selections

Julie Comine, Sonja Sharp, Christopher Vaughan, and **Clarence White** have been selected for the yearlong fellowship program in poetry.

Honorable mentions are Carl Atiya Swanson and Tina Gross.

Fiction Selections

ER Harris, Casey DW Jones, Blanca Martinez Gaviña, and **Elly Zaragoza** have been selected for the yearlong fellowship program in fiction.

Honorable mentions are Julia Shiota and Wakaya Well.

BIOS FOR THE 2022–2023 LOFT MENTOR SERIES FELLOWS

Julie Comine is a lifelong Midwesterner who has lived in Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and most recently, the Twin Cities. She works in circulation at a public library and as a freelance editor. She studied journalism at the University of Kansas and English at Iowa State University, where she was awarded a Pearl Hoglefe fellowship in creative writing.

Kathryn Ganfield is a nature writer and essayist focused on family, environment, and the climate in crisis. She is a winner of the Writing By Writers 2021 Short Short Contest, multi-time winner of the Tiny Truths contest, and a Pushcart Prize nominee. Her work has appeared in *Creative Nonfiction*, *Sleet Magazine*, and *Eastern Iowa Review*, among others. She lives in St. Paul with her family.



ER Harris is an educator and writer based in Northeast Minneapolis. A recipient of a Master's of Fine Arts in Writing from Hamline University, Harris studied under writers like Barry Jean Borich, Deborah Keenan, Patricia Kirkpatrick, Sheila O'Connor, Lawrence Sutin, and Terry Tempest Williams. A 2022 Glen Fellow (Image Journal), she's also received scholarships and residencies from Collegeville Institute, AROHO Foundation, and the Art Farm. She has been published in various online journals and was a MnLit Flash Fiction/ministories winner (selected by judge Leif Enger) for her flash essay, 'Baked Eggs.' When not writing, she's busy teaching grades 8-12 in St. Paul Public Schools and wrangling her 7 year-old and 5 year-old children.

Caitlin Jiao (Hinschberger) Alexander is a Chinese-American transracial adoptee who grew up in Roseville, Minnesota. She holds a B.A. in English and a M. A. in Elementary Education.

Casey DW Jones grew up on the High Plains of Southwest Kansas. He holds a BA in Early American Literature from the University of Kansas and an MFA in Fiction from Hamline University, where he served as Associate Fiction Editor for the *Water~Stone Review*. Casey's work considers the human toll of rural decay and covers themes such as abuse, addiction, neglect, suicide, grief, loss, and intergenerational trauma. His stories have appeared in several literary journals, and he has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Fiction and for Best Small Fictions. After many years of transiency, Casey settled in South Minneapolis in 2008, where he works as a creative copywriter and lives with his wife and two children.

Josina Manu Maltzman (all pronouns welcome) is a writer by passion, carpenter by trade, and rabble rouser by everything else. Josina is published in the anthologies *QUEER VOICES: POETRY, PROSE, AND PRIDE* (2019), *WALK TOWARDS IT* (2017), and *THAT'S REVOLTING! QUEER STRATEGIES ON RESISTING ASSIMILATION* (2004). Jo earned an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Goddard College in July 2020, a MN State Arts Board Grant for writing in 2014, and was featured on KFAI's MinneCulture segment in January '22 talking about the connections between their writing, carpentry, and activism. For more please visit www.josinamanumaltzman.com

Writing that heals. Writing that remembers. Writing that seeks collective joy. That is the writing that **Blanca Martinez Gaviña** has been doing since she was a child. Born in Uriangato, Guanajuato, a town nestled in the central valley of Mexico,



Blanca comes from a long line of story givers. The art of story-giving came from her grandparents and parents, who encouraged her writing and gave her the platform from which to jump into creativity. The Loft Mentor Series Fellowship is her first formal achievement in writing and a step toward her passion for telling stories. In addition to writing, Blanca is committed to social justice and equitable public policy. She currently works as the Public Policy Director for Citizens League. Active and committed to her beloved communities, Blanca enjoys spending time with her loved ones, hiking, reading, and cuddling her two small but mighty pups.

Benjamin Ren grew up internationally in four different countries. He currently resides in Minneapolis, MN, where he studied computer engineering and creative writing at the University of Minnesota. His writing has previously been published in *IMPACT* magazine. He loves travel and travel writing, and his favorite country to visit is Greece.

Sonja Sharp's poetry has appeared in *Water~Stone Review*, *Blue Earth Review*, and *Great River Review*. She has taught in the public schools and studied on a Fulbright scholarship in India. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and two daughters, where she works as a nurse practitioner.

Christopher Vaughan's poems have appeared in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Off the Coast*, and *Del Sol Review*. He has received support from the Community of Writers, Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing, Indiana University Writers' Conference, and Minnesota Northwoods Writers Conference. He lives in Minneapolis and is an elementary school teacher.

Clarence White is a writer, editor, typewriter poet, curator, arts administrator and a former bookseller at the Hungry Mind Bookstore. His publications are included in several editions of the *Saint Paul Almanac*, *Suisun Valley Review* and *Public Art Review*, and his essay "Smart Enough for Ford" appears in the anthology *Blues Vision: African American Writing from Minnesota*. He works in essay when he believes that conversation is possible and in poetry when he is less hopeful. He is the co-curator of the 2016 and 2017 Banfill-Locke Reading Series and Silverwood Park's 2014 Art on Foot. He is a past Givens Foundation Retreat Fellow and was a finalist for mnartists.org's flash fiction contest miniStories. He teaches at Minneapolis College and ice skating with dance company Brownbody. He is the Associate Director of the East Side Freedom Library and lives in Saint Paul.



A writer, former congressional aide and university administrator, **Elly Zaragoza** has written fiction all of her life, primarily short stories for herself and a select few. Her latest work, however, a novel based on a 2003 tragedy, is intended for a larger audience given its subject matter--the deaths of migrants trying to enter this country illegally, heartbreaking attempts that are occurring with increasing frequency. She is a graduate of Macalester College and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and lives in Mankato, Minnesota.

BIOS FOR THE 2022–2023 MENTORS

Fiction

Helena María Viramontes is the author of *The Moths and Other Stories* (1985) and two novels: *Under the Feet of Jesus*, which bears witness to the struggles of a makeshift family of migrant farmworkers in California, and *Their Dogs Came with Them* (2008), a masterful depiction of the lives of the dispossessed, the working poor, the homeless, and the undocumented of East Los Angeles, where Viramontes was born and raised.

Named a Ford Fellow in Literature by United States Artists, Viramontes has also received the John Dos Passos Prize for Literature, a Sundance Institute Fellowship, an NEA Fellowship, a Spirit Award from the California Latino Legislative Caucus and a 2017 Bellagio Center Residency from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 2015, California State University-Long Beach inaugurated the Helena María Viramontes Lecture. Viramontes is Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences in English at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, where she is working on a novel.

A. Rafael Johnson is a writer, educator, evaluator, and the author of *The Through* (Jaded Ibis Press, 2017), finalist for the 2018 Minnesota Book Award in fiction. and co-author of *Creative Evaluation & Engagement: Essentials* (Amazon, 2022). A Kimbilio Fellow, his newest story *Morrison's Note* (Temenos Journal, 2022) questions the nature of our shared reality through metafiction. Johnson is working on a sequel to *The Through* entitled *Follow The Sun*. Johnson teaches at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and co-owns Inspire to Change, a consulting firm based in Minneapolis.

Creative Nonfiction



Rajiv Mohabir is an Indo-Caribbean American author of three acclaimed poetry collections, *The Taxidermist's Cut*, *Cowherd's Son*, and *Cutlish*; a book of translation, *I Even Regret Night*; and his hybrid memoir, *Antiman*. He is winner of the 2015 Kundiman Prize, a 2015 PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant, finalists for the 2017 and 2022 Lambda Literary Awards, finalist for the 2022 PEN Open Book Award, the 2021 National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry, and longlisted for the PEN/Voelcker Award in Poetry. Mohabir has received fellowships from Voices of Our Nation's Artist foundation, Kundiman, The Home School, and the American Institute of Indian Studies language program. He received his MFA in Poetry and Translation from Queens College, CUNY and his PhD in English from the University of Hawai'i. Rajiv is currently a professor at Emerson College.

Ryan Berg is the author of *No House to Call My Home: Love, Family and Other Transgressions*, winner the Minnesota Book Award for General Nonfiction, the NCCD Media for a Just Society Award, and *No House to Call My Home* was listed as a Top 10 LGBTQ Book of 2016 by the American Library Association. His essays have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The Sun*, *The Rumpus*, *Salon*, *Slate*, *The Advocate* and the *Queer Voices Anthology*. He has received writing residencies from Yaddo, MacDowell, and the Everwood Farmstead Foundation. He is the recipient of the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Nonfiction Literature as well as a Lambda Literary Emerging LGBTQ Voices Fellowship and he was awarded the Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant. He lives in Minneapolis with his two dogs, River and Jack.

Poetry

Kimberly Blaeser, past Wisconsin Poet Laureate and founding director of Indigenous Nations Poets, is a writer, photographer, and scholar. She is the author of five poetry collections including *Copper Yearning*, *Apprenticed to Justice*, and the bi-lingual *Résister en dansant/Ikwe-niimi: Dancing Resistance*. Blaeser edited *Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry* and authored the monograph *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*. An enrolled member of the White Earth Nation, she is an Anishinaabe activist and environmentalist. Blaeser is a Professor at UW–Milwaukee, and MFA faculty for Institute of American Indian Arts. Her photographs, picto-poems, and ekphrastic pieces have appeared in exhibits such as "Ancient Light," "Visualizing Sovereignty," and "No More Stolen Sisters." In 2021,



Blaeser received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas. She lives in rural Wisconsin; and, for portions of each year, in a water-access cabin near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota. Additional information available here: <http://kblaeser.org>

Su Hwang is a poet, activist, stargazer, and the author of *Bodega* (Milkweed Editions), which received the 2020 Minnesota Book Award in poetry and was named a finalist for the 2021 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. Born in Seoul, Korea, she was raised in New York then called the Bay Area home before transplanting to the Midwest, where she received her MFA from the University of Minnesota. A recipient of the Jerome Hill Fellowship in Literature and the Academy of American Poets James Wright Prize, she has been awarded grants from the Loft Literary Center, Minnesota State Arts Board, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, and residencies to Dickinson House, Springboard for the Arts' *Hinge*, and Hedgebrook. Her poems have appeared in *The Baffler*, *Ninth Letter*, *Water~Stone Review*, *Waxwing*, and elsewhere. She is a teaching artist with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop, and is the co-founder of Poetry Asylum. She lives in Minneapolis, and is currently working on her next poetry collection, *Roost*.

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Incorporated in 1975, The Loft Literary Center is one of the nation's leading independent literary centers. The Loft advances the artistic development of writers, fosters a thriving literary community, and inspires a passion for literature.