



The Loft Literary Center

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**The Loft Literary Center Announces
2024 Mirrors and Windows Fellows**

**Twelve Minnesota Early Career Children’s Writers of Color and Indigenous Writers
Selected for a Five-Month Fellowship Program**

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of the Loft Mirrors and Windows Fellowship.

While books for young readers is a thriving sector in publishing, those that are by or about Indigenous people and people of color are significantly underrepresented. This fellowship’s focus is to mentor Indigenous writers and writers of color to write picture books, middle grade, and young adult literature. The name of the program is inspired by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s crucial essay, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors” (1990). The fellows will go through six different workshops with six different experts in the field and receive individual manuscript consultations.

This program is funded by the Jerome Foundation and through Loft membership support.

2024 ENTRIES AND SELECTIONS

The Loft Literary Center received 22 entries to the 2024 Loft Mirrors and Windows Fellowship. Three judges read through all applications and deliberated to select the final twelve.



2024 FELLOWS

The 2024 cohort is: **Christian Avey, Cristeta Boarini, Anaïs Deal-Márquez, Npaus Baim Her, Sophia Epony Kim, Sara Joy Márquez, Alyssa Joy Miller, Asahi Nagata, Erin Sharkey, Leticia Snow, Chee Vang, and Sabrina Yang.**

Honorable mentions: **Ngoc Bui and Kayla Gray.**

BIOS FOR THE 2024 FELLOWS

Christian Avey

An aspiring author and artist, Christian writes about inclusion and resilience. He believes that connecting to the reader means breaking away from stereotypes and embracing intersectionality. Christian is a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design, where he earned his bachelor's degree in interactive game design. He is also the online moderator for the Loft's Open Voices Writing Group.

Cristeta Boarini

Cristeta Boarini is a mixed race, Filipino American writer and educator based in South Minneapolis. Originally from suburban Chicago, Boarini graduated cum laude from the University of Minnesota in 2011 with a BA in journalism and cultural studies. Boarini's time as a journalist focused on hyperlocal stories and connecting marginalized voices, which earned her two top honors for her writing from the Minnesota Newspaper Association and the Inland Press Association in 2014. An avid fiber artist, Boarini has also won a third place ribbon for her knitting at the Minnesota State Fair. Since 2018, Boarini has been the program director at 826 MSP, a nonprofit youth writing center, teaching creative writing and leadership skills. During her tenure, Boarini has so far curated the publication of five anthologies of youth writing, with a sixth due out in summer 2024. She lives with her husband and daughter, and their dog.

Anaïs Deal-Márquez

Anaïs Deal-Márquez is a writer whose work explores migration, cellular memory, and healing. She has been published in *The BreakBeat Poets Volume 4: LatiNEXT*, *POETRY*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *The Acentos Review*, *Pleiades*, and *Huizache*. Her manuscript, *Ofrenda*, about migration and home is under consideration for publication. Anaïs was a 2024 semi-finalist for the Lexi Rudnitsky First Book Prize at Persea Books and a 2024 finalist for the Diode Editions Book Prize.



Npau Baim Her

Npau Baim Her, an educator and storyteller, is known for her work in chronicling the narratives of Asian Americans. In 2023, she spearheaded “A Reflection on Hmong Culture & Language” with Public Art St. Paul as part of the Sidewalk Poetry Workshop series. Her digital zine, “Hmong American Experiences during the Pandemic,” was published in 2022 in collaboration with the Hmong Museum. From 2019 to 2021, Her’s works were featured in #MinneAsianStories by the Coalition of Asian American Leaders, *Staring Down the Tiger* by Pa Der Vang, and *The Summit Avenue Review*. Currently, Her holds the position of Arts & Culture Coordinator at XIA Gallery & Cafe, where she champions Asian and BIPOC artists. She was recently selected as one of the many 2023 - 2024 National Leaders of Color Fellows curated by WESTAF and in partnership with US RAOs. In addition, she launched SEA (Southeast Asians) Us Write & Design, a youth program aimed at nurturing the creative, entrepreneurial, and leadership abilities of Southeast Asian youth. This initiative, funded by Coalition Asian American Leaders’ Sparks Fund Leadership and the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota’s Women Innovators Program, led to the publication of the magazine, *Hmong Palette: Our Uniqueness in Bloom* in collaboration with the youth group.

Sophia Epony Kim

Sophia Epony Kim was born in Seoul, Korea and moved to the United States at the age of two. A founding member of Theater Mu, she has acted in the United States and Korea. She is a former Hertog Fellow at Hunter College and a participant at Sewanee Writers’ Conference. The recipient of multiple grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, she is currently completing her first novel *Tomorrow We Will Celebrate*. She lives with her husband and son in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Sara Joy Márquez

Originating from Wisconsin and Puerto Rico, Sara Joy Márquez is a writer, educator, and land steward. She strives for musicality of language and inherent rhythm in her written work, and is fascinated by questions of origin, place, and the paradoxical magnetism between home and wandering. Márquez currently lives, cooks, sings, and walks in Saint Paul, Minnesota with her husband and newborn son.

Alyssa Joy Miller

Alyssa Joy Miller (she/her) is an author-poet who explores themes of faith, justice, and race in America with an emphasis on mixed-race characters and cross-cultural friendship for youth readers. She is a Cave Canem regional workshop participant, and a publishing professional with Broadleaf Books. Alyssa received her BA from Howard University in Journalism, her certificate of copy editing from the University of Chicago, and most recently her MFA in Creative Writing for Children and Young Adult Literature from Hamline



University where she won the Anne Tews Schwab Award for her braided essay tracing Black sermonic rhetoric in the genre of contemporary verse—a topic she guest lectures on. Alyssa is soulmate to Matthew and the mother to four beautiful children who reside in the Dakóta lands of St. Paul, MN. You can find her active in the broader Twin Cities writing community with events through MN Black Authors Expo and MN Book Publishers Roundtable.

Asahi Nagata

Born in Japan, 1992. Asahi creates extraordinary, whimsical, print-like illustrations filled with brilliant color and a hint of vintage charm. By day her clients are big businesses worldwide, and after work, her most cherished yet stubborn client is her 4-year-old daughter, for whom she's delighted to craft personalized picture books based on wild imaginative requests and whatever brings laughter.

Erin Sharkey

Erin Sharkey is a writer, cultural worker, and film producer based in Minneapolis. She is the editor of *A Darker Wilderness: Black Nature Writing from Soil to Stars* (Milkweed '23). Erin is a founding coop member of the Fields at Rootsprings, a retreat and respite space in central MN, and the co-founder of an experimental arts collective called Free Black Dirt. She has an MFA in creative writing from Hamline University and teaches with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop.

Leticia Snow

Leticia Snow currently serves as the Assistant Library Supervisor at the Saint Peter Public Library in Saint Peter, MN. where she resides, overseeing the teen and young adult programming and materials. She has made it her mission to engage with her local community and offer programs for marginalized communities. In addition to her role as a librarian, Leticia is a freelance writer for the *Mankato Free Press* and *Mankato Magazine*. She has also written two children's books as a contract author for Capstone Publishing and has contributed to pebblego.com, an educational website for youth. She recently completed the Ignite Rural at-home artist residency program with the Department of Public Transformation, where she wrote her first children's book, based on one of her father's childhood bedtime stories, with hopes of getting it published. In her free time, Leticia runs ultra marathons, writes poetry, and reads a copious amount of books.

Chee Vang

Chee Vang writes essays and stories about Hmong American experiences, language, relationships and spirituality. Vang was a 2019 fiction fellow in The Loft Mentor Series. Her writing can be found in Ramsey County Library's anthology *This Was 2020* and Hmong Museum's Digital Zine.



Sabrina Yang

If anyone asked her what her first love was, Sabrina Yang would answer, "Writing." Sabrina wrote stories anywhere possible—during her classes, on her mother's expensive printer paper, or after watching her favorite TV shows. Sabrina dreamt of one day publishing stories of far distant lands with merfolk, dragon warriors, and orphan children fighting to survive. However, as she grew, her confidence dwindled in her art. She spent years running away from her calling—being a writer. In 2019, Sabrina received a Bachelors of Arts in Communication Studies, and in 2023, she graduated with a Master's of Science in College Counseling and Student Development. Along with her passion in becoming a bridge for underrepresented students to help navigate an unforgiving educational system, there were moments she expressed herself artistically. Throughout undergrad, Sabrina participated in multiple skit committees and co-wrote scripts for the annual Hmong Night event hosted by the Hmong Student organization. These skits contained lessons such as honoring and remembering one's cultural history, forging a new path as HMOob (Hmong) Americans, and pursuing HMOob excellence through higher education. In 2018, Sabrina performed a collaborative spoken word piece called "There is no name for me." This spoken word piece explored experiences and feelings of identifying as LGTBQIA+ while also being HMOob. An essay about her undergrad experience is published in the collection, *A New Journey: Hmong College Student Experiences* (2020). In 2022, Sabrina hosted a poetry workshop for anti-racist activists and changemakers as a way to process and heal unresolved social justice fatigue through the power of writing and performing poetry.

Honorables/Alternates

Ngoc Bui

Ngoc Bui was born in Vietnam and grew up in the Frogtown neighborhood of St. Paul. They come from a lineage of Vietnamese women and seek to honor them in their life. They currently work in radio and news but have a background in youth and community work. In their spare time, Ngoc enjoys reading and writing poetry, calligraphy, and running.

Kayla Gray

Kayla Gray is a poet and young adult fiction writer with an interest in the inner world of her characters and herself. As a creative person whose existence intersects several communities, her writing process starts with a name, a line, or question. She ponders themes such as: race, religion, class, disabilities, and relationships in her writing. She enjoys writing strong protagonists, nightmarish realities, and emotional intensity into beautiful art. She has an AFA in Creative Writing from Normandale Community College and a BA in Creative Writing from Metropolitan State University. She currently lives in Minneapolis, MN.



MIRRORS AND WINDOWS JUDGES

Mirrors and Windows applications were judged by Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, Sarah Warren, and Sun Yung Shin.

Sarah Park Dahlen 박사라, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She researches Asian American youth literature and transracial Korean adoption. She co-edits [Research on Diversity in Youth Literature](#); co-edited *Harry Potter and the Other: Race, Justice, and Difference in the Wizarding World*; co-created the Diversity in Children's Books infographics; and co-wrote the APALA Rubric to Evaluate Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth Literature. She is represented by Tricia Toney Lawrence of the Erin Murphy Literary Agency. sarahpark.com

Sarah Warren is an award-winning children's book author who worked as an early childhood educator for over 17 years. Her picture books include *Beyoncé: Shine Your Light*, *Charlotte and the Nutcracker* (written with Charlotte Nebres), *Stacey Abrams: Lift Every Voice*, *Everything a Drum*, and the forthcoming titles *Majora Carter: Put Hope to Work* and *Marla Spivak Thinks Like a Bee*. *Dolores Huerta: A Hero to Migrant Workers* was picked for the 2013 Amelia Bloomer Top Ten Book List and awarded a Jane Addams Peace Association Children's Book Award honor. Sarah loves to share stories about cool women who use their everyday powers to change the world. She cohosts book exhibits at the Midtown Farmers Market in Minneapolis and the Minneapolis/St Paul airport. Sarah lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Find out more at sarahwbooks.com and picturebookparade.com.

신 선 영 **Sun Yung Shin** is a Korean-born creative nonfiction writer, freelance arts journalist, fiction writer, poet, editor, children's book author, and frequent public speaker. She is the author of *The Wet Hex*, which won the 2023 Society of Midland Authors Award for Poetry and was a finalist for a Minnesota Book Award; *Unbearable Splendor*, a book of essays and poems which won the Minnesota Book Award in 2017; as well as two other books of poetry, one of which won an Asian American Literary Award. She is the editor/co-editor of three anthologies of essays including *What We Hunger For: Refugee and Immigrant Stories on Food and Family* (2021); *A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota* (2016); and *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (2006 and second edition 2021). She is also the author of two illustrated books for children—most recently the co-authored *Where We Come From*, which was a finalist for a Minnesota Book Award. She has a Master of Teaching from the University of St. Thomas and an MFA in Creative Writing and Poetics from Naropa University. She has been awarded fellowships from the Bush Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board, and the MacDowell Foundation, as well as an Asian American Literary Award. She has been teaching creative writing in the community and in MFA programs for two decades. Forthcoming books



include a picture book about legendary Detroit civil rights activists James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, and other projects. With poet Su Hwang, she is the co-founder of Poetry Asylum; she is also a teaching artist with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop and elsewhere. She lives in Minneapolis with her family.

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.