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**CONTACT:**

Allen Henry | City of Minneapolis  
651-528-9763  
allen.henry@minneapolismn.gov

Chris Jones | Loft Literary Center  
612-215-2589  
[cjones@loft.org](mailto:cjones@loft.org)

## **Junauda Petrus selected as Poet Laureate for the City of Minneapolis**

**The next poet laureate will serve a two-year term from 2025 to 2026**



The City of Minneapolis' Arts & Cultural Affairs Department and The Loft Literary Center are proud to announce the appointment of Junauda Petrus as the city's next Poet Laureate. Petrus succeeds Heid E. Erdrich in this prominent literary role.

"The Minneapolis Poet Laureate program reflects our City's unwavering commitment to the arts and the transformative power of creative expression," said Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey. "At a time when we are all increasingly isolated, poetry unites us in our shared humanity. Junauda Petrus will carry forward this important tradition, using her unique voice to

help bring our diverse communities closer together. We are proud to continue investing in the arts as a cornerstone of what makes Minneapolis extraordinary."

A multidisciplinary artist, Petrus' work spans stage, screen, and page, blending ancestral storytelling, speculative fiction, and poetic verse around themes of Blackness, queerness, and womanhood.

Co-founder of the experimental artist collection Free Black Dirt, Petrus is known for creating innovative performances. Her acclaimed debut novel, *The Stars and The*

*Blackness Between Them*, received the 2020 Coretta Scott King Honor Book Award. In 2023 she released her first children's book, *Can We Please Give The Police Department to the Grandmothers?* based on an abolitionist future that became a Minnesota Book Award Finalist.

Her artistic practice draws on ancestral dreaming, Caribbean heritage, and African diaspora traditions. She's explored these themes across a range of mediums, from aerial circus arts to social-justice driven theater. Deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and historic fabric of Minneapolis, Petrus will use her visionary voice as Poet Laureate to celebrate the city's beauty, struggle, and magic through poetry.

"Junauda Petrus represents the best of Minneapolis" says Ben Johnson, Arts & Cultural Affairs Director, City of Minneapolis, "and her appointment is symbolic of our collective creative possibility to advance and transform our city through the power of poetry and the written word. The City of Minneapolis is profoundly honored to have Junauda Petrus as its next Poet Laureate."

The Loft's Executive and Artistic Director Arleta Little added, "Junauda Petrus embodies the spirit of Minneapolis — visionary, unapologetic, and rooted in justice. Her words combine the power of our collective aspirations with the weight of lessons from our shared ancestors."

On her selection, Petrus relayed, "Poetry is soul medicine and to serve the people of my city as Poet Laureate is a deep honor. I will soak this city in joy, healing, and intergenerational togetherness through poetry. In this time of increasing economic disparities, climate catastrophe, widespread houselessness, genocide, and criminalization of the most marginalized, we need artists to be a part of necessary healing and change. As a child of Black Caribbean immigrants, raised in the 'hood amid the diversity of this city, I give thanks to all of the ancestors of my family and this land. With deep love, I will be the people's poet with all my heart."

She continued, "I am tremendously grateful to Heid E. Erdrich for her grace and wisdom in setting the tone of this role to be grounded in the original people and poets of this land, the Dakota and Anishinabe. She is an icon and powerhouse."

The administration of the Poet Laureate Award was overseen by The Loft Literary Center, which received 24 applications for the position. A panel of five community members carefully reviewed the submissions and unanimously selected Petrus for this honor. The panel also recognized four finalists: Halee Kirkwood, Sagirah Shahid, Kyle Tran Myhre, and Khadija Charif. Loft staff member Lucia LoTempio helped shepherd the selection process, remarking, "The panelists were excited to see how Junauda will transform the city's relationship to poetry and celebrate our spirit as



people. In their minds, Junauda will be a bridge and connector of many communities in Minneapolis as our ambassador for poetry.”

As Poet Laureate, Petrus will champion the power of words, engaging with diverse communities across Minneapolis through readings, workshops, and initiatives that celebrate the city's cultural tapestry.

The Loft Literary Center is hosting a public celebration in honor of Petrus on February 13 at their headquarters in downtown Minneapolis from 6:30 to 9 p.m.

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