



The Loft Literary Center

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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The Loft Literary Center Announces Recipients of the 2026 McKnight Fellowships for Writers

Three Minnesota Poets, One Spoken Word Artist, and One Children's Literature Author Receive \$25,000 Each

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2026 McKnight Fellowships for Writers, Loft Awards in Poetry/Spoken Word and Loft Award in Children's Literature (Younger Children). Since 1982, the Loft has partnered with the McKnight Foundation to offer substantial fellowships to Minnesota writers.

The fellowships are judged by prominent American authors and editors, and the winners, all from Minnesota, are awarded \$25,000 each. The judges this year were Cornelius Eady in poetry/spoken word and Helena Ku Rhee in children's literature.

The Loft received 27 qualified applications in children's literature and 85 qualified applications in poetry/spoken word. This year's recipients are children's writer **Marcie Rendon** (Minneapolis), spoken word artist **Donte Collins** (Minneapolis), and poets **Yahya Frederickson** (Moorhead), **Kara Olson** (Minneapolis), and **chaun webster** (Minneapolis).

The honorable mentions in children's literature are Keenan Jones (Plymouth), Colleen Muske (Stillwater), Phyllis Root (Minneapolis), and Sarah Warren (Minneapolis).



The honorable mentions in poetry/spoken word are Kyle Tran Myhre (Minneapolis), Ollie Schminkey (St. Paul), Ryan Vine (Duluth), and Carolyn Williams-Noren (Minneapolis).

McKnight Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Children's Literature/Children Younger than Age 8: 2026 Recipient

Marcie R. Rendon is a citizen of the White Earth Nation. A mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, an author, poet, playwright, and librettist, Marcie believes it is imperative that we all live in such a way as to insure a future for the children seven generations ahead. The author of four children's books including *Napesni Renegade* (Charlesbridge 2026), Marcie is also the author of the award-winning Cash Blackbear crime novel series (Soho); author of the best-selling, Minnesota Book Award novel *Where They Last Saw Her* (2024); and was the recipient of the 2020 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award and on Oprah's 2020 list of 31 Native American Authors to read.

McKnight Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Poetry/Spoken Word: 2026 Recipients

Donte Collins (he/they; b. Chicago Heights, 1996) is a poet, playwright, and performance artist whose lyric life is a polychronic discipline that helps the daily living get done. His work moves between page, stage, and public space, treating performance as embodied study, placing Afro-now pressure on language in the civic work of Black aliveness. They follow the blues toward its brightness, trusting sweat, sequins, laughter, and longing as serious sources of knowledge. His practice carries Butch-queen poetics and care traditions of the Black diaspora. They live and work in the Twin Cities and are a core member of the transdisciplinary performance collective side by side by side by, where collaboration becomes an expanded sensorium and the spirit plays through movement, sound, and installation.

Yahya Frederickson's books include *The Last Eelpouts* (North Dakota State University, forthcoming), *In a Homeland Not Far: New & Selected Poems* (Press 53, 2017), *The Gold Shop of Ba-'Ali* (Lost Horse, 2014), and five chapbooks, including *Khumásiyát: Poems from the Moroccan Desert* (Finishing Line, 2025) and *The Birds of al-Merjeh Square: Poems from Syria* (Finishing Line, 2014). His poems have appeared



recently in Beloit Poetry Journal, Flyway, The Georgia Review, The Louisville Review, Michigan Quarterly Review, Poem-a-Day, RHINO, and elsewhere. A former Peace Corps Volunteer in Yemen and Fulbright Scholar in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Kyrgyzstan, he's a professor of English at Minnesota State University Moorhead, on Dakota and Anishinaabe lands.

Kara Olson is a poet living in Minneapolis. A recipient of The Sewanee Review poetry prize, Kara Olson's work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Massachusetts Review, Third Coast, and other publications. Her debut manuscript, *The Order of Blooming*, was a finalist for the 2025 National Poetry Series, and her second collection, *The Light Between Us*, was a finalist for the 2026 Trio Award with Trio House Press. She is a professor of English at North Hennepin Community College and is humbled daily by working with students from all walks of life and by advocating for educational equity and justice.

chaun webster is a poet and graphic designer whose work contends with the spatial, temporal, and interpretive limitations of writing to represent blackness outside of regimes of death and dying. webster's work has appeared in numerous journals including Obsidian, The Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day, The Rumpus, Angel City Review, Tilted House, and Social Text. webster is the author of *Gentry!fication: or the scene of the crime* (Noemi Press) and *Wail Song: wading in the water at the end of the world* (Black Ocean). Both books received the Minnesota Book Award for Poetry. *Without Terminus* (Graywolf Press) is webster's first work of nonfiction.

McKnight Award Judging

McKnight Award judges were selected in the fall of 2025. The identities of the judges are not known to the applicants during the application process, and applicant identities are kept confidential from the judges until they make their selections.

2026 Children's Literature Judge

Helena Ku Rhee is an award-winning author of stories for kids and the young at heart. Her bestselling book *The Paper Kingdom* was included on many year-end Best Books lists, including NPR, BookPage, Kirkus, Parents Magazine and the Los Angeles



Public Library, among others. It was also featured on Good Morning America, Entertainment Weekly, and ABC – TV. Helena is also the author of *Sora's Seashells*, which is a recipient of the 2024 Ezra Jack Keats Award Honor, as well as *Shoes Off, Please; Rosa's Song*; and *The Turtle Ship*. Her essays have appeared in The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times and Salon.

Helena is currently based in Los Angeles (her hometown), but she has also lived in various parts of the U.S., Asia and Europe. She loves to travel far and wide across this beautiful planet, counting among her favorite journeys a camping trip in the Sahara, a swim with elephants in Thailand and a horseback-riding tour of Easter Island. She draws story ideas from her travels as well as her childhood.

2026 Poetry/Spoken Word Judge

Cornelius Eady is the author of several books of poetry, including the critically acclaimed *Hardheaded Weather* (Penguin, 2008), which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award. His other titles are *Kartunes* (Warthog Press, 1980); *Victims of the Latest Dance Craze* (Ommation Press, 1986), winner of the 1985 Lamont Prize from the Academy of American Poets; *The Gathering of My Name* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 1991), nominated for the 1992 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry; *You Don't Miss Your Water* (Henry Holt and Co., 1995); *The Autobiography of a Jukebox* (Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1997); *Brutal Imagination* (Putnam, 2001); the mixed media book/cds *Book of Hooks* (Kattywompus Press, 2013); *Singing While Black* (Kattywompus Press, 2015), and *The War Against the Obvious* (Jacar Press, 2018). His work appears in many journals, magazines, and the anthologies *Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep*, *In Search of Color Everywhere*, and *The Vintage Anthology of African American Poetry*, (1750-2000) ed. Michael S. Harper.

With poet Toi Derricote, Eady is cofounder of Cave Canem, a national organization for African American poetry and poets. In 2023, he and Derricote were the inaugural recipients of The Poetry Foundation's Pegasus Award for Service in Poetry. Eady was elected Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2026. In 2025, Eady received the Academy of American Poets' Wallace Stevens Award, which recognizes lifetime achievement in Poetry; in 2024, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Furious Flower. He is the recipient of an NEA Fellowship in Literature (1985); a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry, (1993); among many other distinguished awards. Eady has taught poetry at SUNY Stony Brook,



where he directed its Poetry Center; City College; Sarah Lawrence College; New York University; The Writer's Voice; The 92nd St Y; The College of William and Mary; Sweet Briar College; and The University of Missouri-Columbia. Eady has been a teacher for over twenty years, and is currently the Chair of Excellence in the English Department at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Most recently, Eady read his commissioned poem, "Proof," at NYC Mayor Zohran Mamdani's inauguration on January 1, 2026.

About the McKnight Fellowships for Writers

Now in its 45th year, the McKnight Fellowships for Writers provide Minnesota writers of demonstrated ability with an opportunity to work on their writing for a concentrated period of time. Five \$25,000 fellowships are awarded. One Award in Children's Literature alternates annually between writers for children under the age of eight and writers for older readers. Four fellowships alternate annually between writers of poetry/spoken word poetry and writers of creative prose. Writers must have either published a book in the genre in which they are applying, have been featured as a performer for a significant amount of readings and performances, or have a significant number of publications in literary magazines. The McKnight Fellowships for Writers administered by the Loft are supported by the McKnight Foundation.

Previous McKnight recipients are too numerous to list, but they include Heid E. Erdrich, Taiyon Coleman, Robert Bly, Patricia Hampl, Margaret Hasse, Jim Moore, Sun Yung Shin, Cary Waterman, Sandra Benitez, Deborah Keenan, Jack El-Hai, Leslie Adrienne Miller, Patricia Weaver Francisco, Barrie Jean Borich, Lorna Landvik, Kate DiCamillo, Molly Beth Griffin, Danez Smith, Kelly Barnhill, Ray Gonzalez, Dobby Gibson, Art Coulson, Heather Bouwman, Khary Jackson, David Mura, Shannon Gibney, and Anne Ursu.

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Since 1974, The Loft Literary Center has been the place where words catch fire. As one of the nation's leading independent literary centers, the Loft advances the power of writers and readers to craft and share stories, to create and celebrate connections, and to build just, life-sustaining communities. Learn more: loft.org